

GIANTS
SHOULD BE GELDED

A
Novel by
**BOGART
CARLAW**

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED

BY BOGART CARLAW



G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
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Contents

PART ONE

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

PART TWO

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

PART THREE

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

PART FOUR

PART FIVE

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

PART SIX

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

PART SEVEN

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED

I

There he was a-setting in the alley, puking, Lord, like he was a fountain but keeping right on smoking, First he'd puke, then he'd jam that cigar back in his mouth like a cork, and have another puff at it. I was hanging out my wash when I see him. "Miz Blenner," I yelled, "Miz Blenner! Your kid's out here smoking himself to death!" Then that hired girl they got come running out and then Miz Blenner come. By that time he's dropped the cigar all right. He was out cold and white as a sheet lying in the alley. I went over to see and there was Miz Blenner carrying on like a fool she must be. It was more than the three of us could do to lug him into the house. Lord, he must weigh a ton-ten years old, you know, and bigger than any ordinary man. But we got him to stand up on his own feet at last and all covered with his puke, He opens his eyes and looks at his ma. "Mamma," he says, tears running down his cheeks like a big baby, "Mamma, I was just stunting my growth. The way they said in school, Mamma!" Lord, did I laugh! Miz Blenner turns red-that pasty face of hers.

You may go now," she says, looking at me with her nose in the air. Well, I did go but I give her a piece of my mind first. As if I wasn't as good as her-her and that freak son of hers!

I

THE SLEET froze as it fell. It came streaking down through the half-light and froze hard on the sidewalks. Soon they were covered with a glaze like hard candy and of a sweetish lavender color. Trees and people dark-limbed and spare, were reflected in the sidewalks, shimmering. The trees themselves had a coating like hard candy which shone upon the leafless boughs and made candied icicles of twigs.

Peter came out the door of his father's house and stood for a minute on the porch, watching the sleet fall. He hulked gigantic beneath the porch roof. All his proportions were large, the round head and the broad shoulders, the chunky legs.

He discovered that the edge of the porch where the sleet fell upon it, was slippery. He tried sliding on it with his feet, back and forth, back and forth, between the slender fluted wooden columns. Then he shouted and ran in two strides to the end of the porch where he had left his sled leaning up against the railing. This sled was a special big model, six feet long, with flexible runners and a shiny varnished top.

He grabbed it up in his arms and ran down the steps with it. Even the gravel walk in front of the house was smooth with ice; and the sidewalks were incomparably smooth.

When he threw himself down hard, he could slide almost a quarter of a block. After the first heavy jolt as the

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 8

sled hit the sidewalk, it seemed buoyed up and propelled by a mysterious force. He felt that, if he knew how, he could start it in such a way that it would never stop. It would fly with him through an endless succession of streets and out into the flat country, on and on. It would be like the time he had gone with his father in the cutter to look at some farmland for Minneapolis real estate development; the horse's hoofs had kicked snow in his face and the wind had frozen his forehead.

With his head down and his feet in the air, Peter slewed around a corner and almost ran into the lamplighter — a thin muffled Swede, carrying a light.

"Yeesus! Dummy!" cried the lamplighter, glowering, icicles gleaming on his blond mustache.

Peter picked himself up and mumbled something and smiled. He stood with his big head bent down, smiling. Even so he was a good bit taller than the lamplighter. Maybe the lamplighter would think he was a man and would hit him for being clumsy. Then people would gather around.

“Dummy!” said the lamplighter again, but doubtfully, observing Peter’s bulk. Abruptly he turned his back and busied himself with the lamp on the corner.

Peter kept smiling and glancing at the lamplighter. He couldn’t make up his mind whether he should go away. Now the lamplighter was thrusting his light — a pale flame on a long stick — into the round gas lamp. There was a click and the light went on, shedding a sickly yellow radiance on the lavender ice.

Peter thought he should say something after nearly running into the lamplighter. Mamma had told him always to be a gentleman.

“I—I’m very sorry!” he stammered.

The lamplighter looked at him in the new light from the lamp. He came closer and

looked. His little squint eyes grew round and hard and gleamed like the blond icicles of his mustache.

“How old?” asked the lamplighter suddenly.
“How old?”

“Ten years old,” said Peter.

“Yeesus!” The lamplighter burst into laughter. “Yeesus Christ!”

He said no more but went laughing down the street, the little pale flame waving over his shoulder.

Peter’s face throbbed hot and red. He stood holding his sled which was the special big model. He blinked upward at the street light and noticed how it was flickering, making a noise like moths in summer.

“Well, I don’t care,” he said out loud. He took a long run and threw himself hard upon the bed.

“I don’t care!”

2

On his way home from school for luncheon, Peter paused at the shoemaker’s shop next to the branch library and looked in the window. The shoemaker was there hammering on a

shoe, with his mouth full of nails. Behind him the red door of the stove glowed sleepily. Winters before this, Peter had used to go in on cold days and warm himself. When spoken to, the shoemaker had always grunted because his mouth was always full of nails. Peter had thought that he never talked at all. Then one day the shoemaker had done something very surprising. First he had taken five or six nails out of his mouth, half-emptying it; through the nails which remained he had spoken with astonishing clearness: "C'mere!" When Peter had gone and

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 10

stood before him, the shoemaker had gazed at him for several minutes earnestly without speaking. Finally he had leaned over and had prodded at Peter's shoes with his fingers to see where the toes began. Because this tickled and because he was feeling embarrassed anyway, Peter had burst out laughing. The shoemaker had straightened up, looking offended, saying in an offended voice before he popped the nails back into his mouth,

"All right, but you wait. You be a giant one of these days. Wait and see!"

The shoemaker was a Greek. Farther down the block was a Chinaman who kept a laundry. Boys said he ate dead rats.

3

Except for the Methodist Church, the Blenner house was the biggest building on the street and it occupied two whole lots. Still Mrs. Blenner did not like it. She said this was a very podr neighborhood and she used to look at Peter and shake her head because it was a shame he had to play with such children. There was a gray duplex on each side of the house; and these, she complained, shut out the light and brought in a cheap kind of people.

But Peter never lost a chance of being with Buddy who lived on the top floor of the duplex at the left. One afternoon in the middle of January, after Peter had been sliding in Loring Park, he was returning home about five o'clock, dragging his sled, when he saw that Buddy was playmg by the street lamp out in front of the duplex. With him was another boy named Donald. Both boys saw Peter and let out a yell. He did not answer but took a

long slide toward them, swerving his sled sidewise to a grinding stop.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 11

“Yes, he is!” said Buddy. “He’s seven feet tall. Aren’t you seven feet tall?”

Peter got up off his sled.

“Why — about,” he said vaguely. He knew perfectly well that he was six feet four and he did not want to tell a lie but he did not want to disappoint Buddy either, whom he considered his best friend.

“See!” yelled Buddy, turning to Donald, who instantly belched in disbelief. Buddy rushed at Peter and gave him a push. “How’s the air up there, Pete?”

Buddy began running around the lamp with Donald after him and Peter followed, slipping and stumbling.

Buddy was thirteen years old — a tiny boy with eyes like black buttons. Donald was fourteen years old and larger than Buddy; but even he reached only to a little above Peter’s waist. They were all three in the same class at school.

Buddy was full of ideas and liked to boss things. He would crack out an order in his high voice; and Peter who was twice his size

would move quickly to do his bidding. Peter really worshiped Buddy. If there had been a magic food to make boys smaller, he would have nibbled it until he was just Buddy's size. And his worship extended to all Buddy's ideas which were small and compact like Buddy himself.

Donald was different. Though he made no attempt to be bossy on his own account, he would allow himself to be bossed only so far. He seemed to look on Buddy's bossiness as on everything else in life, with a hard, slightly contemptuous gaze.

Buddy winked at Donald, then planted himself directly in front of Peter. He stood leaning back to look up at Peter, his black button eyes gleaming.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 12

"Bet you don't know what ring around the rosie means!"

"It's a joke," put in Donald, "I told it to him."

Buddy frowned.

"Well, what's it mean?" he asked.

Peter answered nothing but smiled sheepishly. He felt so young and inexperienced beside these two.

"Yahaa!"

They both began to laugh at him, while he stood motion-less, his hands hanging down. Buddy ran around him, yelping:

“Yahaa! He don’t know what it means!”

Peter’s hands were like two big lumps hanging at his sides. He blinked, trying to follow Buddy’s movements. Small boys, ordinary-sized boys, were as confusing to him as gnats buzzing around. They made him look stupid. All his ideas tangled when he was with them; he would spend whole minutes with his mind in a ravel. And yet he was three classes ahead of his age in school.

“Huh?” he mumbled, “what’s it mean?”

Buddy paid no attention. His black button eyes snapped delight. Donald was merely looking on, but obviously en-joying it, and Buddy would wink at him from time to time.

“Ring around the rosie!” screamed Buddy, jumping up and down — “Yahaa!”

But at last Donald began to look bored and Buddy saw and hesitated. “All right — if you don’t know,” Buddy said suddenly, “I’ll tell you. Come here.”

He winked once more at Donald. Then he took one of Peter’s big loose hands in his small tight one and led him mysteriously across the snow toward the row of leafless, shadowy

bushes which Peter's mother had had planted at that edge of the lawn to shut off the duplexes. Donald followed

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 13

at a distance. Peter's heart warmed as he felt that he was closer to Buddy now than Donald was.

Buddy headed straight into the darkest shade between two of the largest bushes and Peter had to bend half over to follow; but then they both squatted down side by side as if in a little nest of bushes with the spiny branches sticking into their legs and backs and tickling them. Donald stopped outside the bushes and stood acting bored, but watching. Peter looked out at him once triumphantly through the interlacing branches which were all skeleton-like, coated with a thick, transparent shell of ice. His heart beat heavy with the excitement and with the feeling that he was now close to Buddy — closer than he had ever been to any boy before. He could plainly hear Buddy's sharp, quick breathing below him and now he felt the breath warm against his ear as Buddy rose up on tiptoe beside him.

"It means," whispered Buddy — his hot little hand tightened on Peter's— "It means

when a girl's skirt blows up in the wind."

"Huh?" questioned Peter, without understanding.

"That's it! That's the joke!" cried Buddy, dropping Peter's hand abruptly and rushing out from under the bushes with a whoop.

Peter watched him go, feeling suddenly cold. He saw him slap Donald on the shoulder, then run back into the light of the street lamp and jump up and down, Donald after him. He knew that Buddy must have said something very bad. But he did not understand; and there was no warm sensation of wrongdoing such as he had had at other times in his past. He felt jealous, too, because it was Donald who had told Buddy the bad joke.

"Ring around the rosie" ... He saw a ring like the ring his mother wore on her finger and a girl with her skirts blowing up in the wind and Buddy — Buddy lying on the

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 14

ground and peeking under the girl's skirts. He didn't want Buddy to do that. All the boys he played with were so much smaller and quicker and cleverer than he; and Buddy was the only one he had ever felt close to. Now he didn't want Buddy to go away from him into

wickedness where he could not follow because he did not understand.

He felt sickish and that he could not stir and so he stayed on under the bushes, motionless, hearing Buddy's shouts and Donald's laughter and smelling the rank, thick odor of his woolen mitten as he held one hand to his mouth. It seemed to him that he would squat forever beneath the black, icy branches, looking out at the lamplight and the two boys playing. At last with a shiver he dragged himself to his feet and walked toward the others, feeling cold and heavy.

"Here comes the cry-baby!" called Donald instantly.

"I wasn't crying, either!" said Peter.

But the tears welled up in his eyes and he looked away from Donald to Buddy.

Buddy was like a stranger running around the street lamp and paying no attention. His little legs flashed and his little black eyes had a bright hard look. Peter stood forlorn, following Buddy's movements. For the moment he forgot all about Donald and Donald promptly knelt down in the snow behind him. Of a sudden Peter felt him there, close behind him; but at the same instant he saw Buddy come running around the street

lamp toward him, not looking at him, and he could not move. Buddy butted straight at him with head and shoulders and hit him exactly in the middle. He made no attempt to parry the blow and he did not even try to save himself; yet he did not fall backwards over Donald as he should have. Instead he just folded up in the middle with a surprised expression and sat down hard on Donald. It knocked all the wind out

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 15

of Donald. Donald was furious and cried. He got up and began to swear, using very bad language.

Peter felt guilty and confused. He was not quite sure how all this had happened; but he knew that somehow he had disappointed them both and he knew that he was always clumsy, doing clumsy stupid things.

"I—I'm very sorry," he stammered.

Buddy was standing to one side, rubbing his head where he had hurt it on one of Peter's brass buttons. Suddenly he turned to Donald and suggested:

"Let's you and me fight him — the two of us!"

Peter backed away. He felt so sick he could die.

“Aw, Buddy,” he said, choking. “Aw, now, Buddy!”

Wasn’t Buddy his friend?

But Buddy was already circling him as Donald was doing, coming closer and closer. Now he could see that they were alike as two terriers coming at him — both so small and furious, both so tight and assured. No wonder Buddy was siding with Donald! He himself was different from Buddy — different from any other boy — and he saw it with astonishing vividness. He could never really be close to Buddy because he was not like Buddy — not like Buddy at all! Still he sobbed:

“Aw, Buddy! Aw, now, Buddy!”

He had to put out his big arms dazedly to keep them away. They were so much older than he and they knew how to fight. Their four small fists worked like pistons. He could hardly see because of the blur in his eyes. Even while they were hitting at him, he envied them and wished that he could be like them. And he pushed them as gently as he could, because he loved Buddy and because Donald was like Buddy. Yet, in his awkward way, without meaning to, he brushed Buddy’s

small pinched nose and it spurted red blood. The blood fell red on the white snow and Peter

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 16

stopped short. He raised both clumsy arms in the air and groaned with agony. He stood absolutely still, while Donald hit at him furiously, sinking tiny ineffectual fists into his middle.

“Oh, Buddy,” Peter cried. “Gosh, Buddy!”

But Buddy did not hear. Buddy was yelling at the top of his voice. Buddy must really have thought that he was dying. There were red drops of blood in the snow.

“Momma!” yelled Buddy, “Momma!”

It was all like a dream — the white snow falling and the black night, the yellow lamplight and the blood, and the one small boy, still furious, coming at him, the other with his mouth wide open, yelling. Peter heard the door of the duplex open. There was a bright, white shaft of light cutting across the snow into the round yellow glow of the lamp; then a scream; and down the dazzling shaft of light sped Buddy’s mother, small and thin, her apron strings flying out behind. Small and thin and furious, she seized Buddy by the shoulder and shook him.

“Who done it? Who done it?”

Buddy did not for one minute shut his distended O-shaped mouth; but his eyes looked over its upper edge at Peter and he pointed. Instantly she whirled; her small, thin, furious body whirled. She came right close to Peter and stood glaring up. He could smell the warm food odors that clung to her; and he saw how her thin hair was parted, just in the middle. There were big flakes of snow settling down into the hair.

“You big bully!” she shrilled.

Then she was silent. The snow kept falling upon them and between them and they were all of them in the circle of the yellow lamplight. It occurred to him to wonder that she did not strike him. She could have killed him

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 17

and he wouldn't have cared. But she did nothing. For what seemed a long time there was absolutely nothing in the scene around him that changed. There was always the snow falling and Buddy wailing and Buddy's mother with the corners of her mouth curled up, looking at him so bewilderingly, contemptuously. Of them all it was Donald

who moved first. Walking stiff on his thin legs, he came close beside her; standing on tiptoe beside her, he reached up and tapped Peter on the chin with one small bony fist. She smiled then, though her mouth still curled.

"You big bully," she said once more, in a whisper.

She put an arm around Donald protectingly and seized Buddy by the hand. Suddenly they were all three gone, swallowed up with Buddy's wails behind the door of the gray duplex. The white, bright shaft of light had dis-appeared. There was nothing now but the flickering lamp and the darkness.

Still Peter stood, slumped loose and gigantic in the middle of the sidewalk with the snow falling wet on his face.

4

When Peter came downstairs after washing his hands and face for dinner, he found his father laughing about his fight. This somehow thrilled him. His father was standing short, square, and bluff and wonderfully red-headed in front of the grate-fire in the sitting room.

“Well, young fellow, so you’ve been fighting again,” said he, winking first at Peter’s mother, then sidewise into the fire. His face was red like his hair, red like the fire. His teeth showed very white beneath a scrubby red mustache.

Actually, Peter had never had a real fight before in his

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 18

life; yet he colored, feeling guilty, feeling suddenly glad.

“Yes, sir!” said he.

His father’s hard little stomach shook with laughter and he glanced slyly at Peter’s mother who was smiling.

“Now, Harry!” cried she, deprecatingly.

But his father only laughed harder, reaching backward toward the fire as if to grab it in his hands. His father loved food and to have a fire burning. In the winter he laid the grate fire every morning before he left and kindled it the instant he got home. Sometimes, when it would not burn properly, he would hold a newspaper in front of the small opening until the flames roared up the chimney. Then all the fine print would be visible, with the black headlines jumping up and down.

“Well, and how does the other fellow feel?” asked he, leaning far back on his heels and stretching his short legs as if he would swell himself up to Peter’s size. “There were two other fellows,” said Peter, glowing. His father opened his two eyes wide so that they each twinkled once wide open.

“Two!”

“Y—yes!” stammered Peter, talking so fast that he jumbled his words together. “And they’re both older than I am but I li—licked them both!”

“Hmm,” said his father; but then suddenly, without another word, he turned his square back on Peter and stood looking down at the fire. In a minute he seized a newspaper and held it up in front. He stood there, rocking on his feet, his clothes steaming, while the flames sprang up like magic behind the printed paper.

Peter could not guess what expression was on his father’s face; but as he watched the flames spring up and saw the broad back sharper and sharper outlined, with all the little

pin-stripes curving outward at the shoulders, he felt abashed. He wondered if his father had thought he was bragging. Then it occurred to him that he had been unfaithful to Buddy. In talking about the fight that way he had been a traitor to his friend — to Buddy who had been his friend. He felt himself grow colder as the fire behind the newspaper roared.

There was a smell of scorching paper.

“Harry! Do be careful!”

“All right,” said his father cheerfully. “All right. All right.” He carefully folded up the newspaper which was scorched yellow. “That’s better! Eh, young fellow?”

He smiled at Peter; and Peter saw at once that it was not disapproval which had made him turn away. It was merely his manner to be abrupt and laconic and to rush short-legged from one thing to another. Still Peter felt chilled and traitorous.

5

Peter made sure that no one was watching. Then he stepped over the low hedge into the lawn. It was just dusk. He could see no light in

his father's house. It was a bleak gray dusk and snowing again.

The snow was falling hard. Maybe it would be away up the trees in the morning. By then he would be lying dead in a drift. No one would know. Probably they would wonder what had happened to him. Mamma would sit up all night with her hair down her back and the firelight shining through it, as she had done that other time when he had been sick. But this time it would do no good. No one would think of looking for him in the big snowdrift by the dark icy bushes. Yes, this time he would surely die. Never again would boys make fun of him. There had been

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 20

so many of them and all the same size and all shouting at him.

He would find a place back in the shrubbery there and lie down and die. Maybe he was so big that the snow would not be able to cover him. Maybe it would just drift around him, leaving his face bare and white, frozen dead.

The new snow was only three or four inches deep above the layer of old hard-packed snow; but it was falling fast. As he lay still, his coat was soon white with it; and a white

fringe hung down over his forehead where the brown hair stuck out from beneath his cap. A wind had sprung up and it was growing colder. The wind whistled through the bushes, making the icy branches rattle.

He heard the front door open and his mother calling him. Her voice rolled over the shrill wind, making hollow places in it like silence. He grew drowsy listening, for of course he did not answer. A man walking along the side-walk smoking a pipe, slipped on an icy place and cursed frostily. Peter heard the front door close again. He could picture his mother with her white face frowning.

From the gray duplex next him came the smell of frying onions. The smell was sweet and sad as a piece on the piano. It drifted out and out on the cold wind above the blanketing soft snow. Now he pictured his mother in their big old kitchen looking into the stove, directing Hannah. Even though she hated housework, Mama must always have things nice. Sometimes she would spend hours thinking up a dessert which they would gobble in a few minutes.

It made him feel sad to think how she would weep for him when he was dead. She would come with flowers every day to his

grave; and his father would stand there by the buggy, very erect, his stomach sticking out, but his head turned a little away. Peter felt so sorry for both of

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 21

them — it was as if his heart would break. He wished that every one could die all at once and now. Often and often he had wished that. It seemed to him that everything in life would be solved by every one's death.

He found that he was crying. He lay for several minutes crying. Then he got up and ran stumbling toward the house. With his eyes full of tears, he almost bumped into his mother who had just come from the dining room into the high yellow-papered dim-lit hall.

"I was calling you," she said sternly; but then she said, "Why, what's the matter?"

He answered nothing but clung to her — a great lout of a son overtopping her. He was crying so hard now that his breath came in hiccoughs. He could not speak to tell her how much he loved her. She led him into the sitting room and they sat down on the stiff couch together. He would have given anything to crawl into her lap — to have her hold him

close against her. But he was much too big for that; instead she stroked his hair and let his large head lie against her bosom.

“What’s the matter, Peter? What is it?”

But he only clung to her until she looked at him anxiously and asked:

“You didn’t get hurt?”

“Oh, no, no, no!” he sobbed.

She pushed him a little away from her but kept her fine slender arm around him.

“I want you to tell me what’s the matter, Peter.”

“Oh, Mama— ” he wailed and he began to cry harder than ever.

He wished he could tell her how he felt. Often and often in the last months when he and she had been sitting quietly together, he had wanted to cry out: “Mama, will I never stop growing?” Of course, every one said it was

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 22

nice to be big. Visitors who came to the house were always saying how nice it was to be big and strong. But wasn’t there such a thing as being too big? Sometimes in bed at night he would lie and watch a giant’s shadow on the wall and he would see the hairy head and the

great cudgel and then, too, he would want to cry out to his mother. He had never heard any good of giants. Certainly he could not be one. But then why should he keep on growing?

Once his mother had had a great many stones about boys who did all their growing early; and she had used to tell these stories to Dr. Bell while he listened smiling— "Well, maybe so. Maybe so." Recently she had said nothing about any of these boys; and Peter knew that even the most unusual of them had always stopped growing abruptly at six feet, six feet one. Here he was at ten already six feet four and still no sign that he had stopped growing. There must be something wrong. The more he thought about it, the more it seemed to him that there must be in his case some dreadful mistake.

It was as if there were a wicked spirit which had him in its power — one hand about his head, one hand about his feet, then yanking him to make him stretch. No wonder he had the strange pains in his knees and in his other joints. In the evenings sometimes he would throb and ache all over and he would have a sick feeling of fear inside him. Once he had complained about the pains to his father; his father had merely laughed at him, saying that

these were just ordinary growing pains and that he should always be careful when he felt them, not to be standing under anything for fear he might bump his head.

Nearly every evening for the past six months he had measured himself against marks on his bedroom door. He would hold a pencil flat on the top of his head and scratch

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 23

it back and forth to make a mark on the door. One evening his mother had caught him doing it and had seemed very angry, saying something about scratching up the nice white door; but then she had gone away down the long hall without saying a word more but still looking angry. He had continued to measure himself nearly every evening and sometimes in the morning. He felt that he had to keep a strict check on himself this way or he might spring up to a fabulous height overnight. Sometimes, when he knelt down to pray before getting into bed, he asked God that he should stop growing now, just at this point, that he should never grow again, never again have the strong pains at his knees and the strange sick feeling inside.

He would take other precautions, too. He would stretch out on his back in the bed and would place himself in an exact diagonal position so that his head was firm against the brass rails at the top and his feet were firm against the bottom. So he would go to sleep, braced as in a vise; but always, when he awoke in the morning, he would find himself twisted loose and growing, unobstructed; then sometimes he would be in a panic. He would jump out of bed and rush to the door to measure himself. There was less and less space left at the top of the door. If he grew much more, he would have to bend to get into his own room as he already had to bend for certain doorways in school. Perhaps he would lie down to sleep in his room some night and grow so fast that he would not be able to get out again in the morning. They would try to tear down the wall; but all the time he would be growing faster. At last he would suffocate in the narrow room with his head and arms and legs all twisted up....

“Oh, Mama,” he cried. “Oh, Mama—I—I—”

But he knew that he would not be able to make her understand. It was always such a struggle for him to say

things; and she was so quick to laugh understandingly before he had made her understand at all.

“You silly boy!”

Or she would grow white and still, which was worse.

“Oh Mama—I—I—”

But he stumbled to a stop; and though she asked him several times more, “What is the matter?” — he kept silent, offering her no explanation of his tears. Then as she went on thinking he must have gotten some hurt, he grew almost angry. He sat sullen in her arms and only vaguely heard her soft voice as she tried to comfort him.

“I’m sure it’s those horrid little gutter-snipes that have made you feel this way. You mustn’t mind anything they say or do, darling. They don’t matter. They really don’t. I wish you did not have to play with all the riffraff of this neighborhood.” She paused. “I thank God,” she cried suddenly, “that my son will never be an oaf, no matter — no matter—”

She was silent and he felt that she had looked at him quickly sidewise, then away again, far away. Still he did not stir. “Oafs and

ogres," he thought, for his mind had tangled the word up with the things he had read about giants in books.

She began again:

"You must not forget your place in the world, Peter. Remember always that you're a gentleman born and bred and just because you have to go around with such riffraff is no reason why you should pay any attention to them."

Then she sat for a long time silent with her arm around him but staring straight down at the carpet where there was a worn place. He grew restless because of the far-away look in her eyes and there were little darkish wrinkles underneath them; At last she heaved a long sigh and said: "Well!" and her arm let go of him. He got up quickly,

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 25

saying that he had forgotten his sled and went out, very tired, to drag it onto the porch.

Hannah came to the door of the living room — with the white cap on one side of her head

as usual — and said briefly:

“Dinner.”

“Oh — dinner,” said Mrs. Blenner, smiling and nodding. She would always smile as if surprised when Hannah announced dinner.

“A — ah, eats!” said Mr. Blenner, mimicking her, and he put his arm around her waist — he was a good three inches shorter than she — and pretended to drag her toward the door. Such playfulness always embarrassed Peter. His mother would protest; but she seemed to like it nevertheless.

The Blenner dining room was rather large and gloomy, paneled in a kind of imitation leather, and set out with dark oak chairs and sideboard. A square drop light, fringed with dark green beads, a little dusty, and covered with dark green stained glass hung from the ceiling to within three or four feet of the white tablecloth. To Peter and his father it was a beautiful arrangement; but Mrs. Blenner had once pronounced it ugly.

Sometimes she had moods when she thought nearly everything ugly. She would look at Peter and sigh, look at him again and sigh, until he felt himself grow hot without knowing the reason. And she would make spiteful remarks about the neighborhood and

about the gray duplexes on either side and about all of Minneapolis in general. She would talk about Back East in Milford where

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 26

every one at least spoke English, where there were no Swedes nor Latvians, Low-Germans, Poles, sprawled across a raw new flat country; and she would say this whole country was like a kitchen platter, exactly like a kitchen platter. At these times, Peter had noticed, his father rarely said anything but looked sad and crushed; yet at these times he would drink his soup extra noisily and smack his lips, though he must have known such sounds irritated her. Once Peter had seen his father really angry when he had stumbled over a rake in the yard. Now he never wanted his father to be angry with him; his mother, he did not mind so much.

Tonight they had roast beef with Yorkshire pudding, browned potatoes, spinach, and currant jelly. They were all three good eaters. Though he was only ten, Peter would eat as much as either of them and sometimes more. "He's hollow clear down to his boots," his father would say and then he would add reflectively, "Seven League Boots!" His father

had a way of carving a roast which would make your mouth water.

"A little of the white meat," he would say, though it was only a roast.

Sometimes he would make funny remarks about people he had seen in the real estate office that morning.

"Sold another of those swamp lots," he would say.

"Ten feet under water," he would say, and wink.

Then Mrs. Blenner would smile deprecatingly.

"Now, Harry!"

It was really she who did most of the talking, for he would hardly ever say anything which had more than seven or eight words in it and he seemed to have to sit back and smile and be silent between each short ejaculation. It was; she, too, who said the wittiest things. Even though she stayed around the house all day, reading,

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 27

she would have something amusing to talk about at dinner. Often she became' gay and would tell some story and then laugh so hard that she choked and had to drink a half cup of

cream before she could catch her' breath. Peter loved it when his mother was gay and his father would watch and listen, smiling, his eyes twinkling. Sometimes Peter felt almost like crying when they pushed back their chairs to leave the table. He would say: "Tell about the butcher, Mama!" and he would be thinking desperately of other things for her to tell about. To leave the table meant that he would soon be leaving everything — all this warm and glowing human world downstairs — and he would have to go upstairs to bed to shiver all by himself in that cold dark mysterious room where giants lurked in the shadows like evil spirits come to claim him. Sometimes, even after he had been tucked in and kissed Goodnight, when he would hear them laughing downstairs, he would feel like jumping out of bed and rushing down to them and screaming at them — to make them understand — that this warm close gayety was something he must not waste, that for all they knew he might grow a hundred feet tonight and they would never have another chance to be all warm and, lose and gay together. "Oh, don't you see! Can't you see!" And it was an impulse strong as no other he had ever felt. It made all rules seem silly

vicious things and sometimes he disobeyed his mother and got out of bed and crept to the head of the stairs. He would go down two or three steps, as far as he dared, then lower himself carefully into a sitting position, and his legs would extend down exactly four steps lower still, almost into the broad shaft of light which came up the stairs from below. So he would crouch in the cold dark, with his head against the banister, listening. His mother would find him sprawled upon the stairs asleep when she came up to bed. Then she would rouse

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 28

him and she would be very cross. Once he had waked with a great start and with a sound like a shriek in his ears; and there she had been on the landing just below him, staring up at him with her face twisted and white. Immediately his father had come rushing up the stairs two steps at a time and put his arm around her. "Oh, Harry, sometimes it — it scares me!" Peter would never forget how she had sobbed. His father had been furious and had turned on him furious. "Now then, sir, what are you doing here! I thought you were put to bed, eh!"

Tonight, when they finished dinner, his father went in and stirred up the fire and put on a big oily chunk of cannel coal. Then he sat down in his favorite chair and began to read the paper. Mama sat down beside him with her sewing in her lap but she had a book open on her knee. Sometimes she would read steadily for several minutes and never even move her needle. Peter, who was lying on the floor with a book of his own, looked up at her whenever this happened trying to gauge the extent of her absorption. Some evenings she would become so interested in what she was reading that she would let his bedtime pass.

His father began to nod. He worked so hard all day with his nose to the grindstone. First his head with all the bright red hair would nod; then the paper would nod, too, in his short blunt fingers; at last he fell quite asleep with his square chin dropped on his chest. As soon as Mama noticed this, she looked at the clock which sat on the mantelpiece; then she looked down at Peter on the floor. He avoided her gaze, centering all his attention on the book he was reading.

"Come, Peter," she said. "You must go to bed!"

She put her sewing down on the couch and ran her

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 29

needle a little way into the cushion. Then she got up and took his big hand firmly, though he grumbled. So they went upstairs.

He was very drowsy. He slipped off his clothes while she helped him; then he said his prayers out loud, kneeling, and climbed into bed. He stretched himself full length while the bed groaned and creaked.

“Goodnight, Peter.”

“Goodnight, Mama.”

She leaned over and kissed him, her lips cool against his warm ones. Then she turned off the light and went out down the hall to the stairs.

“Goodnight, Mama,” he called after her.

But she did not hear him. The stairs squeaked as she went down and he could hear his father in the living room waking with a start.

“Eh! Eh!”

Peter yawned. He was too tired tonight to feel very lonely or very worried. He was too tired to measure himself against the marks on the door. His big body beneath the blankets

was warm; the things about him were close and familiar. Life beat sluggish in him. And yet there were abundant shadows in the room and the feeling of mysterious abundant forces in the night. Through the window he could see the snow forever falling, ghostlike.

II

It was a terrible shock to Grandma Phelps when she came West for the funeral. For he had the high Phelps nose and the wide-set brown eyes and he carried himself well and was formed comely and strong. In spite of what had happened — when she first saw him standing alone on the station platform — she thought: a fine-looking boy, fourteen years old and very little pimply for his years, well-dressed, quite presentable. But then he seemed to tower upward as she came toward him, as if he were shouldering his way up, and that stupid man, Blenner, with his red hair, and his eyes red, too, was all the time pushing her forward toward him. "This is my son-poor Effie's boy!" (Poor Effie's murderer would have been closer to the truth! After all, it was only by a miracle that Effie had lingered on these fourteen years since the monstrous birth.) Yes, and there she was staring straight at the second coat button of this fourteen-year-old boy, while his voice came down at her from his head up above. It was, uncanny.

"Do you really mean to say you enjoy writers like Mark Twain?" asked Seth Williams.

"Why, yes," said Peter.

"Very interesting," said Seth Williams.

"Why?"

Seth Williams was silent, smiling acidly.

Peter had been in attendance at Minneapolis' private Dunham School for Boys less than a week. So far, Seth Williams was the only boy who had shown himself at all friendly. They had taken walks together in the afternoons and had talked about things they were reading. Peter thought Seth Williams had many interesting ideas, most of which he had gotten from books. But he did not like Seth. And Seth's companionship made him uncomfortable, as though it were a kind of stigma. Other boys frankly hated Seth Williams. Even some of the teachers grudged him his good marks, though he was far and away the brightest student in all the seven forms. Perhaps the trouble with him was that he was not only a bookworm but a back-biting bookworm that couldn't keep its mouth shut. Big-headed, thin-legged, he was physically at

the mercy of any one; yet he would make acid, undaunted remarks even when he lay flat on his back with some one on top of him. He was the only boy in the Dunham School who was there on a scholarship. His mother was a widow. A witty teacher had baptized Seth, "The Widow's Mite." Peter didn't like Seth's mother, either. She was a little,

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 34

tight-lipped, smooth-brushed, tailored woman, cool as a cucumber and with a very superior manner. She was from Boston and had a Bostonian accent which seemed to lend her Minneapolis social respectability even though she was poor. Probably it was because of Mrs. Williams' praises of the Dunham School that Peter's own mother had made it her dying wish that he be sent there, too.

"And I suppose you like Dickens?" said Seth Williams suddenly.

"Well, I do."

Seth Williams was all the time smiling his acid smile.

"I never would have thought you could be so — normal!"

"Why not?" demanded Peter angrily.

No one seemed to know how the Dunham School for Boys had gotten such a hard-boiled football coach. He was from the army and had army manners which he exercised without any restraint at all upon the scions of Minneapolis' great.

"Aw, you're yellow," he said. "You're yellow."

At this there was considerable grumbling in the squad. One very slender boy with curly, black hair — whose father was a wholesale grocer — threw his helmet down on the ground and cried loudly:

"Nobody can call a Blumenthal yellow!"

"Why don't you tackle, then?" said the coach. "Jesus Christ! You're all playing like you was dead. When I was in the army I played through one whole game with a broken collar bone. And I got my man, too, every time. I did it on guts." He paused oratorically. "Guts!"

"We heard that one before," said some one in the squad.

"Yes, and you'll hear it again," yelled the coach. "By God, I'm going to make something

out of you whether you want it or not.” His gaze fell upon Peter, standing awkwardly apart from the others— “Even Dopey there. By God, I’ll make something out of Dopey, too!”

At this several of the boys laughed. The coach had evidently come to the conclusion that no one could be as big as Peter was without being a half-wit. Partly because of this, partly because the other boys all looked on Peter as something very strange, too, the coach had begun to make Peter his particular butt.

“Eh, Dopey,” said the coach, leering at Peter.

“My name is Blenner,” said Peter suddenly.

At this even the most discontented members of the squad laughed. The coach put on a very humorous expression. “Well, well — so your name is Blenner. *First* name, Dopey, I suppose.”

“My name is Peter Blenner,” said Peter, speaking with some difficulty through his teeth.

“Well, well,” said the coach. Abruptly he dropped his humorous expression. “Now, Dopey, you and me are going to show these lads how to tackle. At least I’m going to show them. Here, catch this ball.”

Peter fumbled the ball the coach had thrown him, dropped it on the ground, picked it up again, at last stood holding it with a very red face.

“How tall are you?” asked the coach.

“Seven feet six.”

“What do you weigh?”

“Two hundred and fifty pounds.”

“I didn’t know they piled it that high,” said the coach. He waited until the laughter had died down. “Well, now, boys, I’m five feet ten. I weigh one hundred and fifty pounds. Do you think I can tackle him?”

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 36

“Oh, sure,” said several boys.

“Why not?” said the boy named Blumenthal.

Peter had indeed been so slow and careful in all his movements during these first days of practice that the coach’s proposition seemed a very safe one. Perhaps for this very reason the coach grew angry again.

“Do you think I’m afraid of him? Do you think *I’m* yellow?”

No one made any direct answer to this but there were the sounds of grumbling.

“I’ll show you,” said the coach. “Now, Dopey, you go down to the ten-yard line and run up the field. Try and get past me. Just try and get past me.”

The squad lined up at one side to watch. The coach planted himself directly in the center of the field, leaning forward with a fierce expression, his hands on his knees. Peter reached the ten-yard line and faced about. His heart was pumping furiously. He held the ball which seemed very small and slippery clenched tight in one big hand.

“All right, Dopey,” yelled the coach.

Peter hesitated a minute, then broke into a slow trot. He was perhaps ten yards from the coach before he began to run. He began to run all of a sudden with tremendous speed. He ran straight at the coach. The coach had been diving forward, his bullet head lowered, his brawny arms slightly spread, ready for the tackle; but now he hesitated, looking a little up at Peter. Peter caught just a brief glimpse of his face, tilted up, a surprised expression on it. Then he was past the coach — he was over the coach — and all the boys were shouting. Peter lumbered to a stop. The coach was lying on the ground.

Peter came slowly back. The coach was getting up dazedly, shaking himself, saying over and over:

“Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ Almighty!”

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 37

3

The washroom had mustard-color walls and the floors were of green linoleum. There were four or five boys talking together. As soon as they saw Peter, they began to cheer.

“Here comes old man mountain,” they yelled. “Gun-boat Blenner — half a ton stripped.”

“Hi,” said Peter gruffly. He always felt ill at ease with such boys though he would much rather have been associated with them than with Seth Williams.

“The whole school owes you a vote of thanks,” said one of them named Charley. “All we bright boys have been just sitting around on our tails waiting for some one to take that son of a bitch down. Now old man mountain comes in from the outside and does the trick. By God, we’re proud of you,”

Charley was a little chunky fellow with a round, Puck-like face. He was the school

humorist and a very poor quarter-back. On several occasions the coach and he had had animated verbal combats.

"Why, I didn't mean to hurt him," said Peter embarrassed.

"Well, you did," said Charley.

And another of the boys, Blumenthal, added:

"Serves the son of a bitch right."

They all seemed perfectly sincere. He had never felt such an atmosphere of friendliness before. Charley's slightly protruding, black eyes looked almost soulful.

"Well, it wasn't anything much," said Peter.

"Neither is the Pioneer Limited," said Charley quickly.

Every one laughed. Charley could change from soulful

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 38

to impish in a second. Now as Peter approached the urinal, Charley made as if to run and cried out:

"Jiggers, fellows, the Johnstown flood!"

Peter colored. He had often wondered how Charley could be always so quick-witted, how it was that he could always think of such amusing things to say. And he had thought

that he would give anything to be amusing as Charley was. Yet he had always before on such occasions remained perfectly dumb. Now he tried hard to think of some retort— “Get out your raincoats.” “Man the life-boats.” Though neither of these seemed good enough, something urged him on — perhaps it was the new friendliness with which they had greeted him — and after a minute’s consideration he chose the latter.

“Man the lifeboats!” he said, looking around and down at them with a smile.

There was a surprised pause. As the conversation had already gone on to other subjects, they must have found it hard to connect his remark with the one which had inspired it, and none of them looked for anything of this sort from him anyway. He had begun to regret his hardi-hood when Charley suddenly burst out laughing.

“The Johnstown flood — man the lifeboats!”

Then they all began to laugh. Peter stood on one leg embarrassed to button his trousers, and they all laughed harder than ever.

There were swamps all around the hill on which the Dunham School sat and some of them were heavily wooded.

Sometimes the Spring air would blow out of the swamps straight through the classroom windows. Then it was hard

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 39

to sit still. Even outside it was hard to stand still, to move slowly.

One afternoon Peter started out from the school with a group of other boys to take the regular afternoon hike. Lagging, he suddenly got behind a copse of trees and began to run. He did not know why. But it seemed to him that he was running with extraordinary ease. He kept on going faster and faster until in a minute everything was swept out of his mind; his mind was then just a large, empty space, swept absolutely clean and the wind blowing through it. And then he was smelling all the Spring in the air. It was going deeper and deeper into his lungs as he took bigger and bigger breaths; but he had no pain in his side such as he often got from running. His feet were sure. All the little hills he took at one bound. He would double up and go under a low branch without pausing; and he leaped

high over bushes and fallen timber. At last he got right into the middle of the swamp where there were as yet little patches of ice; but the big leaves of the skunk-weed were green, and there was rank grass already grown to such a height that it surprised him. Still he did not pause. Round hummocks of earth bore his weight. They seemed placed like wide stepping stones especially for him, straight through the center of the swamp. Sometimes he would take ten feet or more in one stride and the little mounds would tremble all over as he came down on them but he gave them no chance to sink beneath him. His feet were as if winged and he felt irresistible. He did not want to pause. He thought that, if once he paused, this fleet power would leave him and never return; and some-how he fancied to himself that there were in all the world only these round trembling mounds and the mucky soil between, the scant ice, the grass, and the rank, green skunkweed, and the thawing smells of Spring. But he

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 40

must have doubled on himself as he ran, for he came up out of a swamp and over a hill full speed and almost ran into the group of boys

he had deserted. They all looked up surprised and startled. He stopped running in the very middle of a stride. His feet came down hard upon the hard earth. Immediately he grew dark red at their jokes.

“It was just Spring Fever,” he said later, awkwardly, to his friend Charley, trying to explain himself.

5

Peter's father sighed and sighed. In the year or more since the death of Mrs. Blenner, he had developed a sigh which was really remarkable. It would come bursting forth on all occasions as if a valve somewhere had broken. Nothing could have irritated Peter more. He had loved his mother very much but she was dead now. He didn't want to be reminded of her, partly perhaps because he knew she would not have approved the things he was doing. She would not have approved his smoking cigarettes and being a regular fellow. Above all she would have disapproved the way he made funny remarks and let boys laugh at him.

“Oh, what is it, Father?” Peter cried at last.

“Eh?” asked his father sharply, startled.

“I—I thought you were going to say something.”

His father raised himself in his chair, clutching both arms of it and gave Peter an angry look.

“Hold your tongue, sir!”

Peter answered nothing but sat gazing down, his ears burning. In spite of his bigness, Peter was afraid of his father — of this short-legged, short-necked man, whose men-tal processes were so totally strange to him.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 41

Suddenly his father was on his feet.

“I’ll go up and wash,” he said, not looking at Peter,

“We’ll get started.”

Peter said nothing. His father went to the dining room door, paused there, then turned abruptly around.

“Maybe I ought to dress,” he said, looking past Peter.

“Put on the thingumajig?”

Peter yawned.

“You mean your dinner coat?”

“Yes, yes! Yes, yes!”

Peter smiled a rather superior smile.

“Oh, I don’t think so.”

He waited, smiling, until his father had gone upstairs then he took out of his pocket a copy of the speech he was to give that night, spread it on the table, and began to look through it feverishly. He was one of six Dunham School Juniors selected to compete for the Pillman Cup of Public Speaking. He had had to write his speech himself and to memorize it. He thought he must have it by heart now he had repeated it so often. Still there were certain phrases and words which seemed to stick in his throat every time. With the typewritten pages spread out on the table before him, he said these over in an undertone so that neither his father upstairs nor Hannah in the kitchen would hear and guess his anxiety.

“Shantung ... The devastated province...” The words he had written seemed to have lost all significance. Yet he mumbled them to himself over and over.

He was really most anxious — painfully anxious about this contest which the other boys seemed to take quite casually. Recently he had had a dream which had come back night after night to disturb him. It was a dream of himself at a party — a social

function such as he had never in reality attended. There he was in the center of a brightly

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 42

lit room and the ceiling was just one inch too low, so that he had to bend his head a little forward. All around below him was a crowd of little boys and girls — typical Dunham School boys — and girls like the private school girls he had seen at football games. They were all talking and laughing gayly and they paid no attention to him. He leaned far down over them, trying to hear; but their words rose garbled and indistinct to his ears. He found himself saying — "Huh? Aanh?" — still nobody paid any attention to him. Then they went in to dinner — all of them in tight little groups — and he followed behind them, pushing through the door. There was the table set with shining silver and with green fern leaves on it and tiny pink baskets of almonds and glasses and plates and the chairs were gilt chairs. He maneuvered so carefully to get his legs up to the table, not to bump into it, not to jostle either of the little girls who sat prim on each side of him. When he was safely settled in his chair at last, he breathed a sigh of relief

and folded his hands carefully in his lap and he was not able to repress a smile because he had done the thing so neatly. But then suddenly some one handed him a plate and he knew that it was for a test. All the faces were turned toward him now, watching, anxious, and the bright lights confusing. His whole body pressed down upon the hand which held the plate and the muscles of his forearm twisted under his black coat sleeve. Now his thumb began to tremble. He tried with all his might to stop it trembling and he felt every one watching him. Just as he thought he was succeeding, all his fingers together began trembling violently and the plate was dancing on them, up and down, up and down. He almost dropped it — caught it up again — tried to balance it. He half-rose from his chair juggling furiously. One of his wide-flung arms struck the little girl beside him, but

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 43

he could not stop to apologize. With every movement he made, the plate got farther and farther out of his grasp. He had his arms spread wide now and they extended from one end of the table to the other and swept back and forth and the plate flew back and forth

between them. He was conscious of things going over — there were tinkles and crashes — soon the table itself tipped, went over slowly, and all the china and glassware went over with it and the forks and knives, and all the little girls began to scream and the little slick-haired boys were furious or smiled contemptuously.... Of course that was only a nightmare. Still he was terrified of what would happen this evening when he stood on the platform facing all those people. “Shantung ... The devastated province....”

When his father came downstairs again, Peter noticed that he had not only washed his hands and face which shone with scrubbing but had changed his collar for a wing collar and he had attached the ceremonial white piping into the V of his waistcoat. He really looked handsome, Peter thought. Almost overnight, it seemed, his red hair had turned dead startling white; but his face was still as red as ever, remarkable beneath the white mane.

He stood in the hall, pulling on his overcoat.

“Come now, boy!” he called, giving a violent push with both arms to get the coat on. He came into the dining room, fumbling with his quick blunt fingers at the coat buttons.

“Come now, boy!” he repeated sharply. “You mustn’t be late.”

“Oh, there’s plenty of time,” Peter said.

But he seized his hat and coat and followed his father out through the dining room into the kitchen. Hannah was in the kitchen, standing in front of a stack of dirty dishes, drinking from a cupful of custard.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 44

She smiled at them as they went through toward the garage.

“Good luck!” she said to Peter, holding the custard away from her mouth.

There was a double row of lilac bushes along the path which led to the garage. Some of them were already in bloom and he could smell the fragrance and could see the white ones dimly through the early Spring dusk. He went slowly with his long strides after his quick-stepping father.

When he came, stooped over, through the low garage door, his father was standing with a piece of waste in his hand, polishing the radiator cap of his big new car.

“Get in,” he said. “Get a hustle on, young fellow.”

Peter got in. Though the car was such a big one, he was cramped in the front seat. His knees were jammed against the instrument board and one elbow and his big shoulder protruded outside. The car backed from the garage into the dark alley, then went forward jerkily past ash-cans and little piles of garbage, past the blank rear walls of the Methodist Church, past one dingy side of the long brown tenement and so out of the dark mouth of the alley into the wide dirt street.

“Springish tonight,” his father grunted.

“Yes,” said Peter.

He was surprised that his father should notice. A kind of softness was over everything like a soft mist before the headlights yet the air was cold. His father waited two or three minutes, then ventured another remark.

“I suppose Mrs. Williams will be there tonight.”

“I suppose so,” said Peter.

His father spoke no more but sat hunched forward with an intent expression, hanging on to the steering wheel with

both hands. Peter, too, was silent. His father and he would sometimes pass hours without

exchanging a word.

The Dunham School was some five miles beyond the city limits. His father went by a route of his own which was bumpy and complicated to follow but which was a half-mile shorter than the main traveled road. First they passed endless flat blocks of small stucco houses. All the little houses had lights in them and there were occasional groups of corner stores brightly lighted, with men standing out in front. His father was always imagining that there was a car coming out of these side streets and he would blow his horn loudly but without slackening his speed. Some of the men would look up and begin to laugh or they would shout things which were indistinguishable because they went by so fast. In one place there was a man crossing the street on foot; his father went speeding straight at him, hanging onto the steering wheel with both hands as if he had forgotten how to stop. The man had to jump to get out of the way. Peter could see his face plainly — swarthy, angry, twisted back.

“You God-damn— ”

But then anything more he said was lost. Peter put his head out of the car. The man was

still standing in the middle of the street with both arms in the air, gesticulating furiously.

“Clumsy fool,” muttered Peter’s father.

Now they were getting into the outskirts of the city. They came to a succession of dumps which were being filled in for future real estate development but where there were as yet few houses. Abruptly the street became a country road and dived into a hollow between swamps. Peter could hear the frogs above the sound of the engine; there was a rank smell of gasoline and of green things growing.

“Springish tonight,” said his father once more.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 46

But Peter hardly heard. He was thinking about himself in these same swamps running, about himself in the dream, and about himself as he would look on the platform. He wasn’t really thinking about his father at all when his father spoke suddenly in a voice that trembled.

“Young fellow, I hope you’ll be very careful tonight!”

Peter had been in the school library — where it had been arranged the contestants were to foregather — almost ten minutes before Mr. Stauffer came flouncing in the door. It was Mr. Stauffer who had coached the six of them entered in the competition. Besides being in charge of Public Speaking in the school, he taught the Romance Languages. He was a short fat man with a bald head and with one hand always in his pocket rattling change. When he wanted to demonstrate an oratorical gesture which required both hands, he would fish the hidden hand with great reluctance out of his pocket, make the gesture, then plunge the hand shiny and perspiring back into his pocket again. Now he was very excited and was rattling his change for all he was worth.

He merely nodded at Peter who was seated at a table where there were several hooded lights, thumbing through the typewritten pages of his speech.

Mr. Stauffer paced up and down the room, taking out his watch at intervals with the one disengaged hand and staring testily at it. Two boys had followed directly behind him into

the room. Two more came. Only one was missing.

“Now,” said Mr. Stauffer, staring at his watch, then looking quickly around the room. “Now, where’s that Harper? Where is he, boys?”

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 47

One of them volunteered the information.

“He’s down in the toilet, sir.”

At this three of the boys laughed. The fourth, Seth Williams, looked across at Peter and smiled acidly. After a minute he came over and stood beside Peter with his thin arm on Peter’s chair. As Peter was sitting slouched down, Seth’s head was just on a level with his.

“The kidneys of a great orator,” Seth said satirically into Peter’s ear.

Peter frowned. Now that he had begun to be accepted as a regular fellow he had less desire than ever to be associated with Seth Williams. The advances of such an outsider were even embarrassing to him. He had told Charley: “By God I’d like to lick Seth Williams for that cup.” Charley had answered, “If you do you’ll be the first one ever caught Seth Williams with his pants down.”

“Ah, Harper and the great hour!” Seth cried as Harper came hurriedly in the door.

“Now then,” said Mr. Stauffer. “Now! We seem to be together — at last! Perhaps the contest can go on now. There are a few things I want you all to get. I don’t dare hope any of you will remember what I’ve been teaching you the past month. But at any rate — the three judges will be in the very back of the chapel. Now notice that. You’ll have to speak up or you won’t be heard by the judges. Don’t swallow your words. And gesticulate! Use your hands. Do this — do it with both hands. And remember, no notes. If you forget, well, I’ll be ready to prompt you. I’ll be right in the front row ready to prompt you. Now all of you leave me the copies of your speeches.”

“Isn’t that sweet of him!” Seth Williams whispered.

They all filed out of the library behind Mr. Stauffer. Peter came last, walking carefully so as not to stumble over those in front of him. Down the hall he could see

a crowd of late arrivals standing around the door to the chapel. Mr. Jonas the Headmaster

was in the center of them, bowing and shaking hands.

As Peter came closer, he ceased to look at any of them but looked a little above them. Still he could feel all the eyes and the strange faces bent sharply upward in the silence which preceded and enveloped him; and there was the smell of perfume and of face powder. and the confusing rustle of dresses and, twice, whispers: "Look, Walter!" and, "Look, Mrs. MacDonald!" — all in the silence like a funeral. But, to get through the chapel door, which was about seven feet high, he had to bow his head well over and as he did so, he could not avoid looking down. Just at his side, almost beneath him in fact and impeding his progress was a little round fat lady in a shining white dress. Perhaps his view from above distorted her; but she looked as if telescoped and shoved together. All that he could see of her was perfectly circular; her bare shoulders bulging out in back made one half of the circle and her bust in front made the other. Just off center in this circle was her head tilted back, with her mouth open in a round O and her two little eyes open wide staring up at him. He tried to look past her but could not, and he could not move on because she was just in his path. On a

sudden impulse he scowled, he scowled horribly down at her. Both round eyes fluttered and the round mouth shut; then the head moved convulsively within the circle, settling into the true center of it, and he could see all her hair fluffy and blond; abruptly the whole circle moved out of his way. He shoved through the door into the chapel.

The chapel was shadowy but it was full of people. He had the sense of all the people though he did not look. Mr. Stauffer was in front, beckoning to him violently with his one free hand. The other boys were already on the

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 49

platform standing, waiting for him. There were seven chairs in a semi-circle on the little platform facing the audience. But the chair in the center was for Mr. Jonas. Peter had to pass in front of the five standing boys and the silent shadowy audience to his chair at the end. The platform creaked. Then at a signal from Mr. Stauffer the six of them sat down; and Mr. Stauffer flounced into his own seat in the front pew, facing them.

The chapel waited.

Now the very important personages who had been standing with Mr. Jonas at the door

began to come in. Soon Mr. Jonas himself would come briskly in and with one of his mannish smiles mount the platform. Then the real ordeal would begin. Peter wished he knew what order the speeches were in. Though he kept his eyes lowered — in a slow agony of self-consciousness — he squinted from time to time inexpertly at the audience.

Every pew was crowded. There were perhaps forty or fifty students, exempt and gleeful, with girls from the private school in Minneapolis awaiting the dance which was to follow the speech-making. Also there were fathers and mothers — the elite of the city — nearly all magnates or magnates' wives, some of them in evening clothes.

The chapel was a small one, not a real chapel at all; but the platform and pews were of stained oak and stained oak paneled the walls. Here prayers were said each morning in the English manner; also on occasion football rallies were held, attended by the entire one hundred students; and there were the various public speaking contests.

A series of paintings on canvas, framed in oak and of an equal size, hung at regular intervals around the room; There were: "Jesus as a Young Man," "Sir Walter Raleigh Looking

out to Sea,” “David Holding the Head of Goliath” — inspirational subjects done by a local artist in such dull

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 50

reds and browns that they seemed in the dim chapel little more than vague discolorations of the stained and somber oak.

So successfully old and gloomy was the total effect that it was hard to realize there was not a piece of wood in the room which had not been standing timber, green and juicy, a few short years before.

Every one in the chapel was seated by this time except old Mr. Pillman, the flour mill magnate, and Mr. Jonas. The two of them stood close together in the open chapel doorway, with the brighter light from the hall outside coming obliquely in upon them. Mr. Jonas seemed to be listening intently, while old Mr. Pillman, his thumbs in his vest pockets, pursed his lips in soundless pompous words. They must have known that every one in the chapel was watching them; and as the minutes went by, it became more and more obvious that Mr. Jonas was in a quandary — flattered to be thus in conversation with Mr.

Pillman but nervous because his audience was waiting, restless.

Mr. Jonas had been Headmaster for only six months. Sutton before him — a dreamer and idealist — had quarreled with the trustees and left. Mr. Jonas by contrast made much of being a man's man — he was a great pipe smoker and on occasions he wore a sweater. He was short and thick-set with bowed legs, and his shoulders seemed to repeat the curve of his legs.

It was Mr. Pillman who had contributed the silver cup for this yearly contest — the Pillman Cup for Public Speaking. Every year the name of the winner was inscribed upon it. No one was very eager for the honor, except perhaps Seth Williams, who seemed to be developing a kind of collector's interest in such items.

The competition, however, was compulsory. An emphasis upon Public Speaking was one of the hoariest of traditions

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 51

at the Dunham School. Dunham School parents estimated reasonably enough that their sons would often be called upon in later life to address banquets and conventions.

Now Mr. Pillman pursed his wrinkled lips with what seemed a kind of finality; and Mr. Jonas leaning forward began to chatter quick words in response. Mr. Pillman nodded twice vaguely but turned away before Mr. Jonas had stopped talking. He went slowly, his thumbs in his vest pockets, tottering on his old legs, toward the back of the chapel, where a seat had been saved him near the judges.

Mr. Jonas walked briskly to the platform, a mannish smile forming on his lips as he mounted it and breaking out full and radiant as he turned to face the audience.

Suddenly Peter saw his father in the second pew, sitting beside Mrs. Williams. He had his short arms crossed over his chest. His hair showed unnaturally white in the shadows; his eyes showed their whites too, as he glanced quickly from one strange face to another in the dim-lit chapel.

“It is tremendously gratifying,” said Mr. Jonas, “and bully to see so large an audience upon such a lovely Spring night. Spring and oratory don’t generally mix — though certain of the other Muses, I’m told, have a vernal reputation.”

There were wan smiles in the clean and fragrant-smelling audience. Peter’s father

smiled and nodded; then as if recollecting himself, sighed. But off in one corner, banked with high-busted ladies like funeral flowers, old Mr. Pillman was frowning, Mr. Jonas' hands trembled; the trembling was transmitted to a piece of paper he held and through the piece of paper to nearly all of them on the platform. He hastened to explain as had been explained so often before, the emphasis placed by the Dunham School upon Public Speaking.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 52

“ —the ability to stand on one's feet, to state clearly and succinctly what is in one's mind, cannot fail to be a tremendous advantage to the young man entering a business career — or any other career, for that matter.”

There was a scatter of applause, gloved and gracious. Some of the exempt students applauded vigorously, smiling and winking at the contestants on the platform. Peter saw Charley smiling and winking. But then he noticed one of the little private school girls who had seized this chance to pick her nose politely. He was not quick enough nor clever enough to move his eyes away and she caught him watching her. He felt hot all over and that

he had done a clumsy ungentlemanly thing and his own nose itched.

“But I must not forget,” said Mr. Jonas, “that I am not the speaker of the evening.”

He smiled around at the boys on the platform.

“These six boys,” said he, “have been selected from among the whole Junior class—”

“—of twenty students!” Seth Williams whispered.

“—to compete for the traditional Pillman Cup of Public Speaking. The Pillman Cup, as you all know ...”

This Pillman peroration received excellent applause. People all over the chapel turned to stare back at Mr. Pillman who sat motionless, his lips pursed, looking as if the world were indeed his oyster and he had just swallowed it. Mr. Jonas bowed, flushed and grateful. Then he glanced down at the little sheet of paper he held and announced:

“Mr. Samuel Goldthwaite Harper will deliver the first address of the evening ... Mr. Harper.”

And so the time had come. As the unfortunate Harper stood up to speak, Mr. Stauffer fixed him with a really terrifying gaze

and shuffled through the typewritten speeches which lay in a pile on his fat knee and made a vicious noise with the coins in his pocket. Mr. Stauffer had devoted

one whole month of his spare time to coaching the entrants in the contest. Yet Mr. Jonas had not once mentioned him.

Harper was a little fellow with a snuffly nose. He spoke in a high, squeaky voice of the Experiment in Russia. He rattled off his speech in much the same way that Mr. Stauffer rattled the change in his pocket; and the conclusions he reached were so unflattering to the Experiment and so generally conservative, that his father, a local lumber magnate, beamed with pride and his fattish mother smiled and smiled, showing small pearly teeth.

The next speaker was the class athlete — a solid phlegmatic boy with adenoids. He went slowly and a little stumblingly through *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*.

Mr. Jonas rose after each speech, eyed his sheet of paper in his most authoritative manner, and announced who was next. Every

time he did this, Peter sat with his eyes lowered, breathless.

Seth Williams was fourth on the list. As had been expected, he acquitted himself well. In classrooms when a teacher was explaining something, he sat habitually a little forward with his mouth open as if drinking in knowledge. When he himself spoke, it was as if he merely opened his mouth and let the knowledge out again — with sometimes a sarcastic emphasis. He used none of the gestures nor intonations Mr. Stauffer had taught. His small white hands hung limp and as if contemptuous at his sides. But he enunciated clearly; his voice carried; and what he said had force and vigor.

When he sat down, there was highly conservative applause from the parents who were themselves perhaps a little sick of Seth Williams winning things. From the students there was practically no applause at all and one

abortive groan was heard. Dressed in black and very pale, Mrs. Williams smiled only slightly with her thin gray lips; she sat assured, tight-mouthed and superior.

“The next speaker,” said Mr. Jonas in a hurried voice, “is Mr. Peter Phelps Blenner.”

There was a pause.

“Mr. Blenner,” said Mr. Jonas.

Peter gasped. Preparing to stand up, he held on to his big body desperately as he had tried to hold on to the plate in the dream. It seemed to him that his arms and legs might of themselves go flying around, flailing the chapel and the people in it. Below him in the dim audience, amid the confusion of elder swaying heads, he could see the faces of the students like small lamps lighting up, one by one. He caught a glimpse of his father — a startling clear image of him — fingering the white edging of his vest, looking sidewise hard at Mrs. Williams.

“Mr. Blenner,” said Mr. Jonas again hurriedly, looking up at Peter and raising his voice as one might address a person standing on a step-ladder. Then he sat down.

Peter stood motionless at one side of the platform, his hands behind his back. Perhaps he had never before had such a clear picture of himself as now, standing out solitary and gigantic upon the little platform with the six seated figures so tiny, so far below him. Directly in front of his chair he stood and

stared wide-eyed at the audience. Now he saw the fat blonde lady he had scowled at — even from this angle, telescoped. And he saw the little girl who had picked her nose. She seemed to be giggling, her small red mouth screwed up, her eyes black, squinting. Far back, down there, Mr. Pillman was sleeping; he had gone sound asleep with his lips like a cut purse during Seth Williams' speech.

Peter became conscious of Mr. Stauffer's change rattling.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 55

"Shantung!" said Peter suddenly in a loud voice, announcing his subject.

His voice was large and loose. It went out through the chapel curiously dispersed, curiously defenseless. He felt that it had gone out of him without warning, that it was an emanation of himself hanging large and loose and naked in the air above the audience, like a big naked white boy with all his parts exposed.

Mr. Stauffer had to make his change fairly ring this time to recall him to himself. How could he be so dreamy, standing in front of all these people? — and he knew he must look stupid. He felt that they were all

contemptuous of him and of the naked emanation of him which hung, staling now, in the close air.

He brought his jaws together with a snap. Fixing his eyes on the blurred oaken ceiling above him, he took a plunge into his speech — a sudden heavy verbal rush. It carried him headlong. In fact it caused him to skip from sentence one on page one straight into the middle of page three.

He realized the mistake the instant he had made it, though he went right on talking loudly, giving the third page and then the fourth page. After that first rush, that first long floundering plunge, he had come up shaking his head, blowing off mental steam like a whale. Now he saw everything clear. He saw Mr. Stauffer, red in the face, shuffling the typewritten pages in hopeless confusion. And he saw — though this amazed him — that no one else appeared to have noticed the omission of two typewritten pages of his closely reasoned argument. Still, unless he could find some way out, his speech would fall far short of the allotted time. It would be ridiculously short. Every one would know.

No solution came to him and he grew irritated, though he kept on talking. All the

words and the phrases went

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 56

mechanically out of him. Yet there was this feeling of irritation too, perhaps unreasonable — a kind of impatience, a kind of sense of injustice. What was he doing up on this platform anyway? — facing all these little people contemptuous of him? He was so big. He stood out so big and alone.

He was in the middle of the fourth page when something strange happened inside his mind. Suddenly he was thinking with astonishing vividness about one day on the grass out in front of school. It had been the lunch hour and a sunny day and he had been lying there, unsuspecting, when suddenly the whole seventh form — fifteen, twenty of them — had piled upon him for a joke, trying to pin him down. Then he had risen up furious — to his own surprise, furious — and spilling them about.

He looked down at Mr. Stauffer in the small pew. Without the slightest attempt to conceal the break he jumped from the last sentence on page four back to sentence two on page one. He noticed that Mr. Stauffer's red face grew purple and his eyes bulged.

Something, as if it were some one's finger, twitched downward the corners of Peter's mouth and he scowled. All those little heads in the audience there! Mrs. Williams so superior! Charley so humorous! And Mr. Pillman snoring! And his father self-conscious, studying Mrs. Williams' profile! Suddenly he saw them all so small, men and women; boys and girls, and he could have taken any five of them and clinked their heads together. Now he felt a wish that even as he felt it puzzled him. He wished that he were bigger than he was, fabulous, titanic, thundering down at them. He squared his shoulders and his head jerked erect. He felt lifted up as though something had expanded, filling his body — as though his own spirit

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 57

inside him had risen up and was windily rushing down the far corridors of his body. He suddenly remembered his hands, his arms, and the gestures he had been taught. He took one step to the center of the platform and it groaned beneath him. He leaned far forward and Mr. Stauffer and all the others leaned back. He spread wide his arms as if to pluck

and gather in those white startled faces of the audience.

“In this devastated province—”

There were depths he had never even suspected in his voice and he played with it mightily, letting it whirl like a bludgeon over the peaceful head of the sleeping Pillman.

“Millions starve—”

His voice was roaring now as his spirit roared within him. China! The plight of China! He discovered a sympathy for China such as he never would have believed possible in any white person. He made up words, whole sentences, skipped pages three and four, and went thundering on. Mr. Pillman was stirring uneasily in his sleep-flabby, white, emasculate—soft floury white of flour millions.

“And yet this mighty devastated area—”

Mr. Pillman opened his eyes wide now, started, and wavered. His wrinkled old mouth pursed weakly, sagged, pursed weakly up again.

“—illimitable possibilities!”

Peter’s down-swooping arm struck the little oaken reading stand and it tottered. But he did not pause. That little girl was picking her nose now in earnest, her eyes round as saucers. Oh, all this audience had saucer eyes.

Too soon, it seemed to him, his speech neared the end. He gave out reluctant thunder, the downward-sinking rumbles of the close.

“—and bring a lasting prosperity to Shantung!”

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 58

So it was over. He stood now voiceless, his arms out-stretched, wishing to prolong his mightiness, wishing to hold them forever in his thrall.

But it was over and they were staring at him. Already they had ceased to stare at him with wonder but with hatred, with fear. He could feel their antipathy coming up at him like a wave.

Slowly his arms lowered, dropped limp to his sides. He took a step backward, sat awkwardly down. Still there was no sound anywhere in the chapel. He could see his father's white head bowed. He could see all the other little heads stiff on their scrawny necks, row upon row of heads like lemons, hundreds and hundreds of eyes full of hatred.

“What have I done?” he wondered.

He did not understand. Yet he felt a most vivid terror. Out of the deep recesses of his

body where the wind but a minute ago had most tempestuously blown and many mysterious forces of which he had never before been clearly conscious had been thunderously at work, the terror sprang. This was something worse than his struggles with the plate in the dream. This, he felt obscurely, was something worse than he had ever dreamed of — and it separated him by many centuries from the sleek students. He had wanted anonymity. He had wanted to show himself a regular fellow. Now he stood out from this whole throng like a fifty-foot ogre.

Perhaps it was inspiration which caused him to smile. Perhaps it was the sight of Charley, the two pop eyes in the humorous face. Perhaps again it was the accrued experience of his few years, telling him that the only way he ever would be accepted was to make a joke of everything that was in him, never to be serious, never.

He smiled and he nodded. The smile said plainer than any words: "Don't you see I wasn't in earnest? It was only

a hoax." And the nod of the huge fine head upon the huge young neck gave the smile

comic point, the necessary over-emphasis.

Suddenly some one began to laugh. Then they all began to laugh — these Minneapolis magnates and magnates' wives. As though they were at the theater they laughed and applauded. One of the exempt students — under cover — shouted: "Give him the cup!" And several older voices echoed: "Yes, yes. Give him the cup!" Then they all laughed harder than ever. Even old Mr. Pillman laughed and patted his faded old palms together.

Peter could see Charley's broad, humorous wink, friendly. He could hear Seth Williams' whisper, contemptuous: "The young Bryan." And there was his father's white head raised. His father was looking relievedly sidewise at Mrs. Williams.

III

Naw! He's just a fellow like you and I. Of course I won't deny if he ever got sore — But he's good-natured as they make them.

You ought to see him at the frat house razzing the Freshmen. With a paddle! He'll start that paddle swinging so it'd bowl over the First National Soo-Line Building. But by the time it reaches the Freshmen's fannies it isn't hardly moving at all.

And he doesn't mind being kidded himself. Lord, no. Once some one asked him how the air was up there. He let out an awful belch and said:
"Blowing up a storm."

Lord, the funniest guy to listen to, to look at!

I

PETER SHOOK hands with Charley and Leo at the corner by the Methodist Church.

“Good-by, you old son of a bitch,” Charley said.

“Good-by, you bastard,” Leo said.

There was a pause.

“Good-by, you two bastardly sons of bitches,” said Peter.

They all three laughed. Charley and Peter had joined the same fraternity at the University of Minnesota and Leo was one of their fraternity brothers. The three of them had been all summer working as day-laborers, up near the Canadian border. They had arrived back in town early this morning after bumming their way down on a freight train. Now they had come to the parting of their ways. Charley and Leo went east toward their homes. Peter stood and watched the two of them in the bright morning, walking briskly. They certainly looked like a couple of hoboes. Leo had a red bandana tied around his neck and Charley wore an old felt hat with holes punched in the crown all over to let in the air. The two of them were almost exactly the same height; but Charley seemed shorter, because

he was fatter. Peter raised his arm once, watching them, but they did not look back.

Peter began to smile suddenly underneath his week's growth of beard.

"Old house looks just the same," he muttered.

There was the porch all overgrown with vines, the wide

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 64

lawn with the shrubs, and the big front window upstairs where his mother had used to sit sewing, reading.

Peter smiled and. smiled, thinking how surprised his father would be to see him returning this way. He thought that if his father came to the door instead of Hannah, he would say:

"Could you let a poor man have a little food, bo!"

He rang the bell and waited. The old paint on the ceiling of the porch was beginning to scale; it was full of tiny bubbles and cracks. Somehow the ceiling seemed to be lower than he had remembered it and the front door was very small. When it opened suddenly, he had to step back a pace and bend over to see who was there. It was not his father. It was not

Hannah. It was a maid — but a new one, very neat, very maidish. He was rather taken aback. Hannah had been with them so many years.

“Is Mr. Blenner home?” he asked at last.

The maid shook her head three times rapidly, clutching the door and then she started to swing it shut.

“Hold on! wait a minute,” said Peter, resting one hand against the door. “Where is he then?” he asked.

The stupid girl swallowed hard, looking away from him.

“Don’t know.”

“Well, I’m his son,” said Peter impatiently, “Mr. Blenner’s son.”

She had round Scandinavian china-blue eyes in which nothing he said seemed to make any impression.

“Do you understand?” he snapped, his voice growing high as it still had a tendency to do when he was exasperated. He brought his head down — almost on a level with hers.

She looked at him, then looked away, looked at him, then began to smile. He could see the corners of her mouth working.

"I don't know nothing about it," she said. "Mr. and Mrs. Blenner — they vent out early this morning — I think maybe they go to Art Museum. Mrs. Blenner says; they come back sure for lunch."

She kept her eyes steadfastly away from him now, her lips blubbery with amusement.

"Mrs. Blenner?" he repeated involuntarily.

The maid said nothing.

"Well, I'll come in and wait," he growled.

He brought his head in through the door abruptly and the girl started back. As he moved sidewise in, he caught a glimpse of her going quickly through the dining room toward the kitchen, looking back at him over her shoulder.

He stood in the narrow dark hall, feeling angry and confused. A great many letters were piled on top of the hall table and he looked over a few of them mechanically. He found two letters addressed to Mrs. Williams and one bill from a shoe store addressed to Mrs. Blenner.

After a minute he went through the open door into the living room and stood looking around him. There were several pieces of furniture he had never seen before, two chairs, and in one corner a curious old-

fashioned kind of triangular cupboard with a glass front.

Then he noticed with a distinct sense of loss that the big old chair, in which he had always used to sit reading in the evenings, was gone. He looked around the room several times to make sure. There was a stiff-looking chair with spindle arms instead.

“Well, all this is a hell of a note,” he kept muttering.

And once he thought sentimentally:

“What would my mother ever think of this?”

However, he had no reason to be surprised or shocked. He had expected the event for a long time. And his father had plenty of money now. It seemed to him the most obvious

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 66

thing in the world that Mrs. Williams had married his father for his money.

He was standing in front of the newly installed cup-board, staring vacantly through the glass, when he heard a slow step on the stairs. He went to the door opening on the hall and looked out. Seth Williams was coming down the stairs, holding a book in his hands, reading it absorbedly. He would stand a

minute on a stair reading, then, without raising his eyes from the book, feel ahead of him with his foot for the next stair. He had his mouth a little open as he had always used to do when absorbing knowledge in classrooms at the Dunham School; and heavy horn-rimmed spectacles perched on his nose. Now he turned a page, lifted his eyes, and looked straight at Peter. His heel came down bang on the stair and he stood transfixed, the book hanging limp from his hands.

“Well, hello,” said he after a very long pause.

Peter merely nodded. For the moment he felt unable to speak. Seth Williams shut up his book, keeping his thumb in it to mark the page. He came slowly down the rest of the stairs and stood in front of Peter, looking up.

“This is a very solemn occasion,” said he, smiling. “Very solemn indeed. I daresay you’re surprised. I know I was. They sent you a wire but it was returned.”

Peter made mechanical note of the fact that Seth Williams had gotten a Harvard accent; but he still said nothing.

For almost a minute they both stood silent, looking at each other. Then Seth Williams held up a small hand to Peter. Peter grasped it

and Seth Williams winced. Peter had not intended to grasp it hard but it was obvious that Seth Williams did not realize that.

"I see you haven't changed any," said Seth Williams with a smile; then he said in French — with a Harvard accent also — "*Plus ça grandit, plus c'est la même chose!*"

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 67

"What?" asked Peter, "what do you mean by that?"

"Nothing!" Seth Williams turned away. "I'm for breakfast. I suppose you've eaten."

"I had some grub on the road," Peter answered gruffly, though as a matter of fact he had had nothing to eat since the night before.

Seth went quickly into the dining room and Peter heard him call in his flat voice, "Olga!" So that was the maid's name.

Peter planted himself once more in the center of the living room. He could hear dishes rattling and he pictured Seth with the book propped up in front of him eating.

"This certainly is a hell of a note!"

As he soon smelt bacon he began to feel ravenously hungry and more and more resentful. It somehow made him furious that

Seth Williams fitted into his own home so much better than he did. He passed his hand several times over his chin feeling the stubble. Then he began to walk up and down the room.

The mirror of the hatrack in the hall was in such a position that, when he stood near the living-room door, he could see one whole corner of the dining room. As he walked up and down, he glanced from time to time into this mirror. Now he saw the maid Olga come in, bearing a platter which probably contained bacon and eggs. He paused involuntarily and his mouth watered. She set the platter down on the table and started back toward the kitchen. Suddenly Seth Williams appeared within the range of the mirror. He seemed to be saying something to her though Peter could not hear his voice. An instant later he had his thin arms around her and he was kissing her. She struggled a little but seemed to be laughing. There were indeed smothered sounds of her laughter. It all happened very fast. She disengaged herself, smirked and vanished

in the direction of the kitchen. Seth stood a minute smiling; then he took off his

spectacles and, beginning to polish them, moved back to the table and so out of the range of the mirror.

Peter had stood stock-still, staring, all the time this scene was being enacted. Now he started and colored. He felt that he was red all over.

"Well, for Christ's sake," he muttered. He went and stood bent over beside a window, looking out at the green lawn and the shrubs. "For Christ's sake — even that sissy!"

"And my father, too," he was thinking inside himself. Somehow this made him angrier than anything else — and as if humiliated — and he could not keep from reflecting that he himself, though he was so tough, had never even kissed a girl in all his life.

2

"That reminds me," said Mrs. Williams, pausing halfway up the porch steps. "Ah — Peter." Mrs. Williams nearly always called Peter: "Ah — Peter."

"That reminds me — we haven't told you about our new house yet, have we?"

“What house?” asked Peter.

“It’s to be an Early American house. We’re going to start building in a month now.” She broke off and said rather sharply, “Come in, won’t you?”

Peter saw that three little boys had gathered on the side-walk out in front to look at him. He sighed and followed Mrs. Williams into the dark hall.

“Yes, we’re going to build a new house.”

She was taking off her hat as she spoke. Peter noticed

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 69

how neat and sparse her gray hair was, parted exactly in the center; and how she smiled at him with small even teeth.

“On the Lake of the Isles Boulevard, and we hope to make it something very real architecturally.”

“Well, that’s fine,” mumbled Peter.

Though he knew so well why Mrs. Williams had married his father, he could not figure out why his father had married Mrs. Williams. After all, though his mother had been maybe a little snobbish, she had known how to be gay. Her hands, which had been so white, had been very hot too, and her lips if cool had been soft.

“And, Ah — Peter,” said Mrs. Williams, smiling. “We’re having a special room built for you in the new house with special furniture and appurtenances. Special conveniences. It’s all been very carefully planned. You’ll be, I believe, comfortable.”

“Oh, yes?” he answered, coloring; but then he noticed how gruff his voice was and not wanting to be rude, he stammered, “Well, thanks a lot.”

But that was rather awkward too, he recognized immediately and he felt irritated with himself for being at such a disadvantage with her. He said:

“But I’ve always gotten along all right here.”

She did not answer anything but smiled and nodded. Then she went away from him still smiling, moving with-out movement like a very small glacier but very quickly too, gliding icy up the old stairs, not one of which creaked beneath her, up the stairs to her room which was the room his mother and father had shared.

Peter was making the first call on a girl that he had. ever made in all his eighteen years. It was unfortunate that the ceilings in her apartment house were so low. . He had to stand well bent over as he tapped at her door. He was nervous lest some one should come along the hall and find him in this awkward position as if peeking through the keyhole. He tapped again and louder. This time he heard steps inside the apartment; suddenly the door was flung open.

“Oh!” gasped Miss Whitefield.

“How d’you do,” he said, smiling.

She stood staring at him. She was a very thin, tall young woman. She had a small, finely modeled head, with small, fine features, a long thin neck, and long thin arms and legs. She held her head stiff on her neck and her body stiff like a stalk supporting the head on its neck. Now her long thin hands were twitching. Perhaps his face seen so close had startled her; undoubtedly she had not expected to find him bent over so.

“Well,” she said at last as if getting back her breath.

She attempted to glance past him down the hall; he himself had thought he heard footsteps on the stairs.

“Well, do come in.”

She stood to one side, watching as he pulled himself through the door. Immediately he was inside, she closed the door and stood straight upright against it, looking at him.

“If you’ll pardon me,” he said, repeating a speech he had practiced, “I’ll just sit right down on the floor here. These modern apartments are a little small for me.”

“Oh, yes. Yes, do.”

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 71

It was a single-room apartment with bathroom, very tiny; and the bed, which served as divan in the daytime, took up a great deal of space. He sat down with his back against the far wall, drawing his feet up as close to him as possible to get them out of her way, and clasping his hands around his knees. Then he looked at her and laughed.

“Back to baby days, you know.”

She did not seem amused. She was still standing with her back against the door, looking at him. It made him nervous.

“But it’s a very nice apartment you have here,” he said, “very nice.”

“Oh, yes.”

She sat down abruptly on the edge of the divan which was covered with some brilliant red stuff which looked like cotton.

Now that he was here he felt rather at a loss how to proceed. Charley would have known. Girls didn't embarrass Charley. In fact, Charley was always in love one way or another. "Hook, line, balls, and sinker," he would say tragically; then he would look up at Peter, his round face ludicrous. "You don't know how lucky you are, Pete, you old son of a bitch..." "Yes?" Peter would say, feeling vaguely irritated; yet it was he himself who had started the story that he was a woman-hater. Now he wasn't so sure. There was something about having his father married again, about having Mrs. Williams constantly around the house — even though Mrs. Williams seemed sexless as a cucumber — which, had brought the matter of girls close to him.

"It's certainly been hot today," said Peter.

"Yes, it has," said Miss Whitefield.

Of course it wasn't as if he were in love with Miss Whitefield. He had seen her only a few times. She was employed at the Art Museum and was helping Mrs. Williams with

plans for the new house — the interiors. From what Peter had seen of her, he liked her — especially in contrast to Mrs. Williams. Even compared with girls in classes at the University he liked her. She was so much less sure of herself. She was not quick, confusing, constantly giggling or laughing at the wrong moments. And there was her small, fine head, all her intricate small fine features which he thought beautiful. But probably it was the fact that she seemed as embarrassed in Mrs. Williams' presence as he himself was that had drawn him to her. Each time after Miss Whitefield had gone, Mrs. Williams would seem to take a pleasure in discussing her before him, saying, "Poor girl, she's so self-conscious." Well, but only people with small selves or with no selves at all were not self-conscious. "She's twenty-six years old and an old maid already. Of course — so tall." But how ridiculous. She was six feet one inch tall, it seemed.

It surely was hot on the job up North this summer," said Peter.

"Really," said Miss Whitefield.

Peter did not believe that Mrs. Williams had really meant what she said. What possible

difference could two or three or five or six inches make? He thought that Mrs. Williams had been talking indirectly at him — at his own bigness which she resented — just as she was doing in the matter of the new house and the special room for him. “Like a God-damned hyena in a cage, I’ll be,” he had told Charley. And the last time he had seen Miss Whitefield he had said: “I suppose you’re helping with the plans for my stable.” It had tickled him to see how embarrassed she became.

“Remember you were going to show me some of your pictures,” said Peter.

“So I was,” said Miss Whitefield; but she did not stir.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 73

The silence between them grew and grew. She was fidgeting with her long, thin hands. Suddenly she jumped to her feet.

“I’ll give you a drink,” she said. “You can’t appreciate art without liquor, you know.”

He laughed, feeling rather devilish, remembering that she was from New York.

“I guess you’re right, Miss Whitefield.”

She started past his left knee toward the bathroom door. But then she hesitated and looked at him searchingly.

“The doctor gave me a prescription. I’ve been very nervous — not well. That’s how I happen to have the liquor.”

He stopped smiling. She went past his knee into the bathroom.

“It’s whisky,” she said, pronouncing the word as if it were a disease. He could hear the clink of glasses. “You won’t mind drinking out of a toothglass?”

“Oh, no.”

As he did not think it would be polite to look at her while she was in the bathroom, he kept his eyes fixed on the hall door by which he had entered.

“Do you want some water in it?” she called.

.

“No, thank you,” he said quickly. “I like it straight.”

She came in and handed him a glass. There was just a little rim of liquor in the bottom of it.

“Thank you,” he said.

She went with her own glass and sat down on the edge of the divan. She had on long earrings today which made her head look smaller than ever. He thought she seemed older with the earrings and in her own room, older and more self-possessed. He himself felt

out of place, cramped by the room, even rather young and inexperienced. He assumed a look of profound connoisseurship, holding the small glass to his nose.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 74

“This smells fine,” he told her.

She made a grimace as she drank.

“Artists, you know, are shocking. All artists are shocking. All the old women in this apartment house would think it was awful if they could see us now.”

This came as a new thought to him; but he was rather pleased by it than otherwise. He emptied his glass but she did not notice. She was drinking her own whisky and water with determined little sips.

“It’s strong,” she said, looking at him with a smile “isn’t it?”

“It’s very good,” he said politely. He might just as well have had a tablespoonful of water. He wished she would offer him another glass. But she went right on sipping, grimacing, sipping, until she had finished her glass too. Then she sat, holding the glass in her hands, as if she expected something to happen. She caught his eyes upon her and laughed. “I think it’s very strong!”

He noticed that her face was flushed. He could hardly believe that she was feeling the little bit of whisky she had had. It gave him assurance to think that she was affected by a drink like that.

“It’s probably eighty proof,” he said.

Obviously she did not understand. Her pale skin looked transparent with the pink flush on it. He felt that if the light in the room were stronger, he would be able to see all the intricate small bones of her cheek and jaw and of her temples from which the hair was drawn back.

“Remember you were going to show me your pictures,” he suggested once more.

“Was I?”

She sat for a minute looking at him.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 75

“All right,” she said gravely, “I’ll show you a picture that I admire very much.”

She got up, pulled a suitcase from under the divan and rummaged in it. She took out a picture mounted on card-board and handed it to him. It was a picture of a perfectly nude woman, very fat, lying out on the grass. The first glimpse he caught of it, he thought she must have made some mistake; but she was

looking at him earnestly as if awaiting his reaction. He held the picture up close to his eyes so as to hide his face from her. He kept glancing at the picture, then glancing away.

"It's beautiful," he said at last, "I think you're a very fine painter."

She smiled.

"That's a reproduction — a Renoir."

"Then you didn't paint it?" he asked, feeling rather relieved.

"Oh, no, it's just a reproduction — but a very fine one in colors — fourteen colors!"

He nodded, holding the picture out away from him critically.

"But I wanted to see some of your pictures."

Her face became gloomy.

"I told you," she said, "I only paint little pictures — just postage stamps."

"But I like postage stamps," he persisted. "My uncle was a postman."

This was the kind of retort which went over big at the fraternity house. She did not smile. Her face had grown gloomier and gloomier, though still flushed by the whisky.

"All right, if you want to see one," she muttered.

She rummaged once more in her suitcase, while he watched, rather embarrassed,

thinking that perhaps his persistence had been impolite, since she seemed to feel so

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 76

strongly on the matter. At length she drew out a picture on canvas which was really one of the smallest he had ever seen. It could not have been more than five inches across by six inches high. He took it from her gingerly, holding it between his thumb and forefinger. It was a picture of an apple, an orange, and a glass of water on a green chair.

"You see how puny," she said, leaning to look at it in his hand.

"Why, I think it's fine," he protested. He really did like it better than that other one — the naked woman.

"No!" she cried with such violence that he started.

She went stamping into the bathroom and brought back the bottle. It was a pint bottle, almost full.

"I'm going to have another drink," she said. "Will you?"

As he nodded, she poured a little into his glass, spilling some over the edge; then poured a little into her own glass, spilling some over the edge of that, too. She put the

bottle back in the bathroom once more, took both pictures from him, jammed them into the suitcase, and kicked the suit-case under the divan.

“No,” she said. “No, that’s terrible! A puny life — puny pictures — you can’t avoid it!”

She raised her glass to her lips but as she had forgotten to put any water in it this time, she choked and had to gasp for breath.

“Ugh!” she said, “I don’t see how any one could ever be a drunkard no matter — no matter how unhappy they were!”

He smiled, emptying his glass in a gulp.

“Well, it’s a taste you’ve got to develop, you know.”

She did not seem to hear. She had sat down on the edge of the divan and was going after her whisky again with the same small determined sips, grimaces. Soon she had sipped all the whisky out of her glass but she did not seem

cheered up. Indeed, she looked even more gloomy. She rested her small chin on one of her long, thin hands and sat gazing darkly through the open bathroom door. He tried to think of something to say; but he had

forgotten the clever remarks he was going to make; they had nearly all concerned her painting anyway. He hadn't supposed that any one took painting as seriously as this. Could there be something else troubling her? He wished she would say something. He began to think that she was dark, inscrutable. Maybe she wanted him to go. He had no idea how long a gentleman should remain in a lady's apartment. It was strange that her eyes were not dark as they should have been to go with her dark hair. They were a curious color-less blue. From a distance they looked black; when he had first met her, he had thought them black; there was a darkish tinge to the skin in the small hollows below them and in the lids above them and these dark surrounding circles were much more colorful than the eyes themselves.

Suddenly without raising her chin from her hand, she spoke:

"Don't you ever feel you're only about half-alive — only half-living?"

"Well, I'll tell you, Miss Whitefield," he said, assuming his most humorous tone of voice, though indeed the question had touched on a very sore spot. "The way I figure it is, when

I'm only half-alive, I'm not doing anybody any harm, am I?"

She did not answer. She did not smile. Her face as she gazed through the open bathroom door was like a small carved cameo face in which the eyes were indicated merely by depressions.

"Have you ever wanted to commit suicide?" was her next unreasonable question.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 78

At first he thought she must be joking; but she seemed perfectly serious.

"Why, no," he said awkwardly.

"Haven't you?" she questioned, moving her face sharply toward him on the pivot of her palm.

He did not know what to say.

"Well — I suppose — every one — when I was a kid, for instance, I can remember sometimes wishing I was dead — but—"

"You have! I thought so!" she snapped, pivoting her gaze back through the bathroom door.

He felt caught up, convicted, decidedly uneasy, too. "And in spite of the fact that you're very young," she said after a minute.

“Oh, I’m not so young,” he broke out. He began to explain: “I’ve always been older than my age. When I was just a kid, I started playing with boys four or five years older than I was. At the University—”

But he saw that she was not listening and stumbled to a stop.

“People are so cruel,” she said.

He was baffled, troubled. Were all girls like this? But he supposed she must be unusually sensitive. He had a momentary brief feeling of panic. This call of his seemed turning into something serious. All he had really wanted to do was to play around with some girl as Charley was always doing. He would have liked to change the subject.

“Different!” she mused. “That’s all you need to be—just a little bit different for people to make you miserable, to point at you, to laugh. Any one outside the norm—there are so many against you — and every year it’s worse, every year more lonely.”

Her face was like a mask in miniature of tragedy. He had never been alone like this with a woman before. He

had never talked intimately with a woman before. Now somehow, though he did not understand what it was that troubled her, her sorrow communicated itself to him, moving him more than he would have thought possible after all his humorous years.

"I've always been very unhappy all my life," she said.

"These last months it's seemed as if — as if I couldn't go on."

There was something in her voice which made him want to cry. He was grateful that the room was getting dark. The farther corner of the divan on which she sat was in deep shadow. The door to the hall was losing its outline, merging into the wall. He no longer felt how small and tight the room was about him — about them. The room no longer existed really. They were together, close, in an entirely unformed and shadowy space.

"Oh, I don't see how you stand it!" she cried suddenly; and she was looking straight at him. Even in this little light he could feel her colorless eyes fixed upon him.

"Me?" he cried. He sat up with a jerk.

"You must be very brave."

He was subtly pleased but mystified.

“Just seeing you sit on the floor,” she said. “Oh, it’s cruel! Cruel! It brought everything so plain to me. Myself. Buying ready-made dresses and having them too short for me. Going to a dance and there are never any but little men. After all it amounts to the same thing as sitting on the Boor.”

“Why, I don’t mind sitting on the floor,” he objected.

Her eyes left him as suddenly as they had fixed upon him.

“Or maybe it isn’t hard for a man,” she said. “But for me — oh, nobody can ever realize what I have suffered from — from not fitting in — from being so tall.”

Tall! So that was really it. Could that really be it? Six

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 80

feet one inch. Suddenly he began to smile. “For God’s sake,” he thought. “Women!”

“Why you aren’t tall,” he said aloud. “You’ve been listening to Mrs.—”

He was going to say “Mrs. Williams” but then it occurred to him that it would have to be “Mrs. Blenner,” and the words stuck. She was paying no attention anyway.

“People are so cruel. I don’t think there’s anything more cruel than people are.”

“Why,” he said, “people are all right!”

And somehow in that moment he felt more convinced that people were all right, that the world was good, than ever before in his life.

She looked at him solemnly, a little unsteadily. Perhaps the heartiness of his voice had offended her. “When you’re as old as I am, you’ll know — you’ll— ”

4

Peter walked up and down sighing and sighing; but Charley paid no attention. Charley was reading an old copy of *College Humor*. At last Peter stationed himself directly in front of Charley.

“You know, I think I’m in love,” said he.

Charley looked up, and slowly removed his pipe from his mouth.

“What?”

Peter fetched another sigh.

“I think I’m in love.”

“Jesus Christ,” cried Charley.

Peter stared at him rather resentfully.

“Who with?” asked Charley.

“Why, with a girl,” Peter answered.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 81

Charley put his pipe back into his mouth and screwed all his face around it. After a minute he began emitting clouds of smoke.

“Well, that’s tough,” he said.

Peter felt mollified.

“I know it seems funny to you, Charley, after I’d been a woman-hater all my life. But that only makes it the harder when you fall, you know.”

“Oh, I know,” said Charley.

Peter was conscious that Charley was looking at him with great interest and he sighed several times more, keeping his eyes on the ground.

“What kind of a girl is it?” asked Charley.

“An artist.”

Charley gave a brief expressive whistle.

“But she’s a lady,” said Peter quickly.

“Have you told her you love her?” asked Charley.

“Well, no.”

“You haven’t even told her you love her?”

“Well, as a matter of fact I haven’t seen her more than about four or five times.”

“Lord, that oughtn’t to make any difference.”

“Well, of course not.”

“You tell her you love her,” said Charley, “and see what she says.”

“Well, I’m going to.”

“—and kiss her,” said Charley.

Peter colored but smiled.

“Well, naturally,” he said.

“Jesus Christ!” said Charley.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 82

5

Peter had on a pearl-gray hat, and gloves dangling from his hand, and it was the first time he had ever walked out with Miss Whitefield — with Miss Elisabeth Whitefield-with Elisabeth — and it was the time he had chosen to tell her he loved her.

Still he said nothing though he took her arm at every corner, and she said nothing and did not look at him.

It was evening because she had wanted it so. And it was fall with the smell of burning leaves in the air. Now they went past a low house shadowy behind vines, and a strange dog came growling at them.

“All right, boy,” said Peter reassuringly, snapping his fingers at the dog. “All right, boy!”

The dog, which had been sniffing at his ankles as he walked, looked up suddenly, its long muzzle whiskery, trembling, the whites of its eyes rolled up, showing. It stood stock-still trembling as its eyes traveled up, then howled, then abruptly sprang away. It ran swiftly up the darkness of the street. There was something savage about the darkness and the dog. Peter looked down at Miss Whitefield and laughed. But Miss Whitefield did not laugh.

Now the street they were following turned into a wider paved avenue with a street-car line and small stores on each side, interspersed with signboards in vacant lots. The avenue looked startlingly new, clean and empty. Most of the stores were closed but all had lighted show — windows with electrical appliances, automobile tires, refrigerators on display. There was a very bright purplish light suspended over the middle of the avenue at each corner. The light shone on the white pavements, the metal street-car tracks, and the white sidewalks. They could see no one else on the

avenue which was perfectly straight, stretching away in either direction block after block into the distance.

They turned to the left along this avenue and went on walking, Miss Whitefield very fast, he very slowly to keep pace with her. Miss Whitefield looked stiffly into all the show windows. Occasionally he, too, would bend over to see into some store, the interior dimly lit and the counters bare and things neatly piled on shelves. Everything was so clean and still like the frozen white refrigerators in the bright show windows.

After several minutes he noticed a street-car coming toward them, as yet far in the distance. He could hear it already in the empty silence, clanking, grinding up the wide avenue. It looked like a curious yellow bug with one yellow eye and a phosphorescent body creeping over the antiseptic pavements.

"Let us turn off here," said Miss Whitefield in a queer, strained voice.

"Why, no," he objected, surprised. "That's not the way to the lake."

Miss Whitefield was silent. The street-car came closer rapidly, but without perceptible

movement, as if it were really stationary in the wide street, swelling and bulging with a grinding noise, its one eye blinking. Now it was so close he could see the dust flying out at the side from beneath its grinding wheels. Unexpectedly it screeched to a stop just in front of them to let some people off.

He felt that Miss Whitefield hesitated in her stride. But they were abreast the street-car and he had not time to look at her.

There was a crowd of young men standing on the back platform smoking. One of them — a short, fat fellow with a smooth blond face, crinkly yellow hair and a straw hat

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 84

perched on the back of his head — suddenly began laughing and pointing. All the others looked and saw Peter. Even inside the car people began standing up, craning their necks to see. The crowd of young men on the platform had the point of vantage and they began whistling and laughing. The short, fat fellow who had first seen Peter, leaned far out from the platform and shouted:

“Where’s the circus?”

And another man yelled:

“But wait till Mama’s little boy grows up!”

An old woman and a man who looked like a church deacon had just gotten off the car. They stood motionless, close beside the car. The old woman was shaking her head and clucking; but the church deacon stood bolt upright, his belly sticking out, like some one on the defensive.

Peter didn't look away but returned the gaze of that whole street-car as he passed. And he smiled as good-humoredly as any one could have smiled under the circumstances — much more good — humoredly than the average person would have smiled, for he had been through hundreds of such encounters before. It was the sudden realization that Miss Whitefield was no longer beside him which was his undoing. In his surprise and confusion, looking around for her, he did not notice a half-lowered awning in front of one of the store windows. He ran smack into it. The metal bar hit him across the mouth. He recoiled and his hat fell off. The pain almost made him cry out. He wheeled abruptly, holding his hand to his jaw, and glowered at the men on the platform. All of them were now rocking and shaking and jumping up and down with laughter. Even the old deacon was laughing, holding his belly. The car started

suddenly and ground away up the wide street, with people hanging out the back and laughing.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 85

Deserted in the center of the street with the little old woman beside him, the deacon stopped laughing abruptly. He became suddenly very solicitous of the old woman, seized her by the arm and hurried her across the street. And a soda clerk who had come out of the drugstore on the corner went back in, avoiding Peter's eyes but keeping an obstinate smirk on his face.

Peter rubbed his jaw slowly and put on his hat. It was only now that he remembered to look around for Miss Whitefield again. She was already a half-block away and was walking as fast' as she could back in the direction they had come from. For a minute he stared stupidly; then he hurried his steps after her. He caught up with her at the next corner.

"What's the matter?"

She did not slacken her pace and she did not answer him, did not even look at him. He leaned far over so that he could see into her face; he could see it very plainly in the

purplish light from a street lamp — all the infinitesimal small carving of her head, the delicate sharp, fine edges of her features, now twisted as if in pain.

“Why, Miss Whitefield,” he asked again. “What’s the matter?”

And he laid one hand upon her. He was genuinely concerned for her — genuinely. “But Jesus Christ!” he was thinking all the time inside of himself, “What a hell of love affair this is turning out to be.” And he was feeling a kind of humiliation as she still did not answer him, as she kept right on walking as fast as she could go.

Was it the humiliation? — or was it some scrap of Charley’s humorous advice? — which suddenly made him tighten his hand about her thin shoulders, made him lean farther and farther over, bringing his big head close to her

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 86

small head, his big lips close to hers. He tried to kiss her.

“Oh!” she cried. Then, “Oh, oh!” she cried, and now there were her colorless eyes, wide, hysterical, fixed upon him, “Oh, no, ho, no! Oh, help! Oh, help!”

Then she had twisted away from him and she was running. Before he could know what had happened, she was running, her long thin body ludicrous, the thin arms stiffly flapping — down the wide empty lighted street, over the antiseptic sidewalks — growing smaller and smaller in the distance.

6

Peter's father gave one abrupt knock at the door, then entered. Peter had been lying on his bed reading. He got to his feet in surprise.

"Well, boy— " said his father at once and briskly; but then he did not go on and he did not look at Peter. He stood with his hands clasped and his back to the window, rocking back and forth as though the window were a fireplace.

"Clara— " he began; but then he stopped again. Clara was Mrs. Williams.

"Now what?" thought Peter. He waited, staring at his father wonderingly — this short, square, strange man who was even more a stranger now that he had married again.

"Well, father," Peter said at last.

His father grunted.

“Understand you’ve been going around some with the little Whitefield girl.”

Peter started and frowned; he hadn’t seen Miss Whitefield for a week. He certainly would never see her again if he could avoid it. “Oh, I was just kidding myself along,” he had told Charley when Charley had asked for a bulletin

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 87

on love’s progress. “I never really gave a damn about her.”

“Well?” said Peter.

There was a very long pause. His father blew several times through his teeth.

“What about it?” Peter burst out. For some reason he was angry.

“Why, this — just this — ” His father squared his shoulders and cleared his throat and Peter had a definite feeling that what he was about to say was a quotation from Mrs. Williams — “Marriage is out of the question for you with any ordinary person.”

“Marriage?” cried Peter in amazement.

His father was silent but fidgeting, his eyes on the floor. From the bathroom halfway

down the hall there came the sound of the closet being flushed.

"It's better to know the truth," said his father. Another quotation.

"What the hell do you mean?" cried Peter suddenly.

His father looked square at him.

"What! What!"

"What the hell do you mean? What the hell are you talking about!"

7

Charley raised his two small rather pudgy fists above his head and beat them back and forth in jerky ineffective movements. He was more than a little drunk.

"I've got it and I know it. And I know who gave it to me. But I'm not crying about that. Not by a long sight! What makes me sore, Pete, is all these God-damned hypo-critical bastards that *haven't* got it!"

"Well, I haven't got it!" said Peter.

"Oh, but Christ Almighty, Pete," cried Charley impatiently,

“you’re different. Can’t you see? It’s these smooth, hypocritical bastards at the University here who go out with girls every God-damned night.”

“Of course I don’t know anything about girls,” said Peter, “and I don’t give a damn about them, either!”

“Naturally! Naturally! Naturally!” said Charley, emphasizing each word with such terrific blows of his small fists that his round body rocked unsteadily on the chair. “Listen, Pete, it’s these kind of fellows I’m talking about: they’ll go out with a girl; they’ll paw her; they’ll slobber on her; they’ll stick their hand any place they can; but will they go farther? Hell, no! Not they! They’re too God-damned nice for that! They’re Christian, they are! So far, no Father, like they say. And then they wash their hands and go to Sunday School.”

“Well, that sounds pretty lousy,” said Peter guardedly.

“Lousy?” Charley shouted. “Lousy? It’s stinking! By God, Pete, when I go downstairs in this fraternity house and see my own brothers — my own brothers walking around smiling, and they haven’t got it, I feel like killing them. Why should I be the only one to

have it? Why should I be picked out from them all? Why?"

Charley was silent and Peter, too.

"You're the only one of them all I'd tell this to, Pete," said Charley, "because — well, because—"

Charley did not finish.

Peter was looking at him amazed. Was it possible? Was it possible the little short pot-bellied Charley could feel that rage — that murderous mysterious all-embracing rage — which had risen up on occasions within himself? Charley usually so humorous — not very ogreish perhaps even now — yet obviously filled up to the brim with hatred for the whole world.... He felt vaguely disconcerted by the discovery

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 89

of such a similarity between them, at the same time relieved.

"I think I understand how you feel, Charley," he said slowly. "As a matter of fact I've felt that same way myself."

Now it was Charley's turn to stare.

"You! But you never had it!"

"Well, I never had that."

“Well, then,” said Charley, “if you haven’t had it, believe me you don’t know what it’s like. Believe me, Pete old boy, if you ever felt this way you’d be dangerous. Four hundred pounds of concentrated hell-fire.”

Even in his misery Charley could not help laughing at the idea. Peter was silent.

IV

Now what is there in store for a creature departing so violently from the norm? It very definitely gives me pause. I feel a kind of responsibility. I have him in my Lake Poets class, you know. It's very interesting. He has what I should call a good ordinary mind — but in that body an ordinary mind! At first I thought there was something profound about him. like Dr. Johnson's dog walking on its hind legs — there was something wonderful in the mere fact of a freak like that thinking at all. But there was never on analysis anything extraordinary in what he said. The only extraordinary thing was that a freak should be talking, should be thinking about poetry. He is bound to have some very hard knocks in life. Now it all bears out what I said: that education is bad for some people. A freak like that should remain a freak. He should never have drunk at all of the Pierian spring.

PETER WALKED quickly across the campus under the bright June sun. Nearly every body he passed hailed him. "Hi, Pete!" "How's the air up there, Pete?" And Peter grinned down at them: "Fine! How's the air down there?" Even boys he did not remember ever seeing before seemed to know him and to be eager to greet him. On this his Commencement Day, he felt triumphant striding across the campus, with his diploma in his pocket and all his future in his mind.

He was tanned in the sun. He was tanned and strong and healthy. He was well-groomed, well-dressed. He was intelligent, a popular and prominent member of his graduating class. And he was a perfectly normal person. He had made himself perfectly normal. He was nine feet two inches tall but he held himself well. He weighed four hundred and fifty pounds, but that was right for his stature and his age, twenty years. He was well-developed, well. proportioned. His head was the right size, his arms, his legs. Sometimes when he caught a glimpse of himself in mirrors in stores, it seemed to him that his features were a little coarse but whenever he

studied them at home he could not notice this defect. His hair, which he parted on the left, was straight, brown. His eyes wide-set. His nose, high-bridged and thin, jutted from his head at a rather distinguished angle, it seemed to him. Toward its middle it curved very sharply down, hawklike.

He paused for a minute on the bridge over the Mississippi.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 94

Far down below him, the yellow muddied waters sparkled in the sun. An auto went past, full of University boys and girls, going toward Minneapolis; all the boys yelled at him, and he raised his arm in a humorous salute. One of the girls popped her head out of the back of the car as it disappeared across the bridge. She stuck her tongue out at him. He laughed. Girls, he thought. Christi Girls didn't count. The world was a man's world. The world was, more particularly, a businessman's world. And now, just as soon as he could get a job, he was going to belong. To all that serious crisp clean world of business of which he had caught brief ideal glimpses in the advertising columns of the *Saturday Evening Post*, he would belong.

Already he had bought books on business and had begun to study them at home. "Advertising — A Modern Force," "The Theory of Investment," and a book on insurance. For he was not certain exactly what he wanted to do. All that he was certain of was that he was going to belong. He would be a unit in that everyday parade of the business men of America. With the smell of coffee and bacon and toast and of Listerine and of the crisp clear morning air still faintly astringent in his nostrils, he would enter his clean business — smelling offices. "Good morning! What's the news? Good morning! How are tricks?" All the little offices would be neat and clean in the early light and the stenographers very crisp, fitting crisp white paper into intricate shining black machines. His office would be at the end of a line of other offices all identical. On the desk would be the pile of his correspondence and his own stenographer waiting there, smiling. "Good morning, Mr. Blenner." He would dictate terse letter after letter. "Yours of the 15th inst." He would have an "inst." in every letter. The men in the office would very soon begin to see

that he meant business. "Have you been watching Blenner — there's a man with something on the ball...."

"So it's a real white collar job you're after," Seth Williams had said. A real white collar job. And he had meant that as an insult. For a minute Peter had stood looking down at him — at the big head, the thin legs, the spectacled eyes. Next fall Seth Williams would be starting back to Harvard to begin a postgraduate course. A.B. M.A. Ph.D. Seth Williams was not normal though he was only five feet five. Seth Williams had not enough red blood in him to be normal — to write advertisements, to sell bonds. Probably he would end up as a professor, a weak-kneed under-paid spectacled professor in some tiny jerkwater New England college. Suddenly, though he hated him, Peter had felt almost sorry for him. "That's right, Seth," he had said mildly, "I'm going to be a typical college graduate."

Now, standing upon the high bridge, looking down at the yellow sparkling Mississippi, Peter could not understand how any one could be scornful of the normal could wish to differ from the normal which was so beautiful, so fine.

But he had stood motionless a minute too long. There were already fifteen or twenty people surrounding him and there were more running toward him from both ends of the bridge. He smiled at them all, pushing his way through; then he went on walking with his long strides quickly.

On the other side of the river there was a big signboard with a poster on it advertising a circus in town that week. Seeing it, he recollected the paragraph which had appeared in the University newspaper the day before. "Old Pete gets the George Adams Crump Prize in Literature, too — and he was voted 'Biggest man in his class' — no competition. The *News* would like to know what old Pete's going to

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 96

do with his future. We understand Barnum has a place fitted up for him. It's a good-sized place, too, with plenty of peanuts. Well, good luck, Pete"

Peter laughed out loud; and a little freckle-faced boy who had been running along beside him shouted with joy at the sound. Peter winked down at him; and the boy fell rapidly behind, but shouting still.

Soon Peter had reached the downtown section of Minneapolis. Here the streets were crowded. He held his head high, looking from right to left at all the gleaming store fronts in the sun, at the people, who stood to either side, watching him pass. As usual, groups followed behind him, running to keep pace. He did not mind at all. Every one seemed perfectly good humored. Even the swart mamas who held their babies up to see him were perfectly good humored, squat and swart and smiling in the sun. He heard one woman say:

“Ain’t he good-looking, though, just the same!”

How could any one mind a procession so triumphant?

2

In the reception room of Dinwiddie and Company, Advertising, at 8:25 o’clock of the morning Peter reported for his first day of work, there was no one except an office boy and the portly white-haired woman who sat at the desk. The office boy, of course, was all grin in an instant. The white-haired woman

had been prodding in her ear with the end of a penholder; but she paused with the penholder in midair as Peter came into the room. She had been very disagreeable and suspicious on several occasions before when Peter had been in the office applying for a job. Still, all that was past now: they were both employees

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 97

of Dinwiddie and Company. Peter felt a certain affection even for the office boy who must split his face wide open if he grinned a minute longer.

“Good morning,” said Peter to the white-haired woman smiling and nodding.

He went quickly across the room, through the door which opened on a long line of glass-partioned offices. As he entered the big inclosure where the stenographers’ desks were, he heard a confused hum of voices. Girls and a few young men were standing around the desks in groups of two and three talking. The voices stopped abruptly as he took a step forward into the room. He knew that every one was watching him. He approached the nearest group — three girls.

“Pardon me,” he said. “Could you tell me: which is Mr. Swenson’s office?”

The three girls stared. For a minute they gave him no answer. Then one of them cleared her throat.

"I'm Mr. Swenson's secretary. Did you have an—an—"

But a fit of giggles seized her. She turned to her two comrades. "I'll die," she confided in a perfectly audible whisper.

At this the three girls shook with merriment. Peter began to feel rather impatient.

"I didn't have an appointment," he said. "But Mr. Dinwiddie told me to see Mr. Swenson."

The girl who was Mr. Swenson's secretary made an effort to control herself.

"Please come with me."

She opened the door of one of the glass-inclosed offices and stuck her head in.

"Mr. Swenson," she said. "Here's a — a gentleman—"

But then she completely broke down.

"Oh—oh—oh."

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 98

Peter heard a voice inside, small, irate.

"Now, Miss Borglund. What's the matter? What's the matter?"

The girl tried to answer but could not. A little spare neat man, looking very annoyed, suddenly appeared in the doorway.

"Now, Miss Borglund," he began, but he saw Peter and stopped short.

"Good morning," said Peter quickly. "Mr. Dinwiddie told me to report to you."

The little man looked up at him out of small bird eyes, somehow hostile.

"My name's Blenner," Peter added.

Still the little man said nothing. His nose was beaked — birdlike as his eyes. His smooth blond hair and the skin of his face seemed all of a piece — the same color, even the same texture.

"I have never," he said, addressing himself to no one in particular. "I have never seen an office in such an uproar as this one this morning."

Peter shifted from one foot to another; at length he began again:

"Mr. Dinwiddie— "

The little man took him up with disconcerting suddenness.

"Mr. Dinwiddie told you to report to me!"

"Yes."

As the little man said nothing more, Peter added:

“He said you were to take me under — under your wing for a few days.”

There was a titter from somewhere behind them. Mr. Swenson gazed fiercely in all directions; his eyes fell upon the luckless Miss Borglund.

“Miss Borglund!” he snapped.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 99

“Yes, Mr. Swenson.”

“Type those letters.”

He looked back at Peter.

“Well, come in.”

Peter bent low to go through the door.

“Wait a minute,” Mr. Swenson said irritably. He pushed a filing cabinet back against one wall, lifted an electric fan and put it behind his desk. “All right, come in.”

He closed the door behind Peter, then let out his breath in a sharp little blast.

“Well, sit down.”

Peter looked at the three chairs in the room.

“I think if you don’t mind,” he apologized, “I’ll just sit right down here on the floor.”

Mr. Swenson looked at the chairs, too, and smiled faintly.

“Oh, you couldn’t hurt those chairs,” he said. “That’s one thing you — those chairs are

aluminum. They'll bear any weight, any weight at all. We advertise them."

"Well, they're a little small for me."

"They'll bear any weight," Mr. Swenson persisted.

I know — but the arms," said Peter. "It's nothing unusual. Chairs are generally too small for me. I generally sit on the floor."

Mr. Swenson said nothing but frowned at the three chairs.

"Have you any objection?" Peter asked.

"No. No. Go ahead. By all means sit on the floor."

But as Peter prepared to do so, Mr. Swenson muttered, Excuse me a minute," and left the room slamming the door behind him.

Peter looked at the closed door in surprise. After a minute he sat down on the floor, drawing his legs as close up to him as he could, and waited. He did not understand

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 100

how he had offended Mr. Swenson. He wondered if Mr. Swenson was as disagreeable with every new man sent him. At any rate he would do everything he could to conciliate him. He knew how important it was in

business to be on good terms with fellow-workers.

The little office he sat in seemed curiously still. All outside, he could hear voices rising, falling, laughter. Everything in Mr. Swenson's office was still and neat and businesslike. There was a neat pile of letters on the desk. A neat map on one wall was neatly dotted with red and green pinheads.

Peter liked this neat office, the map, even the aluminum chairs. This was the way he thought business ought to be. This was the way he himself would be as soon as people got used to him. Of course, he knew there would be difficulties at first. But people would soon see how serious he was. The important thing was that now he really had a job. "Now I belong," he kept thinking. "I'm really started. I'm really a cog." "How's that, you poor little son of a bitch," he had written to Charley in Chicago. Charley was in insurance in Chicago. But it was at least as good to be in advertising in Minneapolis. And Dinwiddie and Company was the largest advertising agency in the Twin Cities, in the whole Northwest.

It was true he might not have gotten the job if it hadn't been for his father. He had never supposed that getting a job would be so

difficult. All through the long hot summer he had tramped the Twin Cities and he had found nothing, nothing at all. Most places they had just laughed at him. One man had told him right out, "You ought to go into the ring. That's where the big money is. You'd draw a gate — no matter how poor you was."

At last Peter had grown almost desperate. He had felt that he was being set apart — though he was perfectly normal

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 101

— he was being set apart in a sense that was rigid and serious, final.

Charley from Chicago had written:

"Well, why doesn't your old man give you something to do?"

And Peter had asked himself. Why?

When he was a boy his father had had it all arranged between them half-joking that he would be a real-estate man and they would make it a partnership, Blenner and Son. As Peter had grown bigger and bigger his father's remarks on the subject had grown more and more joking; but since he had married Mrs. Williams he had said nothing about it at all.

Of course it must be Mrs. Williams who had silenced his father in this as she had silenced

him in so many other things. Mrs. Williams didn't want Peter to get a job. She had made her opposition obvious.

"Why do you worry about work just now, ah — Peter. You're so young and there's really no need. Why don't you travel — why don't you go to France?"

"If you want to write, why don't you write novels?" Seth Williams had suggested.

"Yes, yes," Mrs. Williams had said with unwonted eagerness. "Why don't you go to France and write novels?"

"Sure — or sonnets!" he had replied rather rudely.

And he had glanced at his father who seemed nervous and ill at ease.

"Don't worry," Peter had said, very slowly and looking hard at his father. "Don't worry. I'll find a job."

Then abruptly he had left the room.

Again two days ago when Peter had told them about Dinwiddie and Company, Mrs. Williams had said nothing but had looked intensely pained. His father had congratulated him — sincerely he thought, though with many

side-glances at Mrs. Williams; Later that same evening his father had come to his room. Did Dinwiddie say anything to you about me?" "Why, no," Peter had answered surprised. His father had grunted. "Well, I'd spoken to him about taking you on — he handles some advertising for us — but I'd be just as well satisfied if you didn't say anything about that, boy." His father had looked old, standing there with the light in his white hair and the line of his mouth vague where he had lost all his teeth.

"As a matter of fact, Clara thinks it would be just as well if you didn't have a job..."

Mr. Swenson was taking his time. Five, ten minutes passed and there was still no sign of him. The door was several times opened by young men who stuck their heads in, stared long at Peter, then said: "Oh, pardon me," and closed the door.

Only one of them made any other attempt to converse with him.

"Hello, I was looking for Swenson. Had an idea. Mustard!"

"Yes?" said Peter, trying to appear understanding.

"I'll be back" murmured the young man and turned to go but then he hesitated with his

hand on the door. He was a solemn-looking young man with long tragic hair and a long handsome face.

“That reminds me. Want to have a look at you. You’re Blenner. I’m Watson.”

“How do you do,” said Peter.

“Don’t get up. Don’t get up. I’ve already seen you up.”

Watson was looking at him closely with his head on one side.

“You see, the Lozier Giant. I’ve got twenty pieces of copy to do before night.”

“I beg your pardon,” said Peter disconcerted.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 103

“Surely you’ve heard of the Lozier Giant. Tests socks! My idea. I invented him. Good? It’s marvelous! Just hold your two hands together as though you were pulling some-thing. A little higher. Fine. That’s fine. Gives me ideas—”

After gazing at Peter from several different angles sadly, he murmured: “Much obliged” and went out.

A minute later Mr. Swenson was back, looking very important. He sat down.

“I suppose you’re going to find it hard to take orders from an ordinary-sized man, Mr. Blenner.”

Though his tone was jocular, his eyes when they met Peter’s were hostile as ever.

“Why, not at all,” said Peter, embarrassed. “I don’t know anything about all this, you know. I’m here to learn. And, Mr. Swenson, I’d like you to understand how serious I am about things. I’m sorry I have to sit on the floor like-like a camp meeting — I know it must be hard for you to get used to. But I certainly do want you to understand that I’m serious. I want to fit in here and I’ll do anything — I’ll do— ”

“That’s fine.” Mr. Swenson slightly closed his eyes. “The most important thing in advertising is— ” He opened his eyes very wide and shot the last word out — “what?”

Peter jumped and Mr. Swenson looked pleased.

“I beg your pardon?”

“I asked you what is the most important thing in advertising?”

Peter put his hand to his head and pondered this question. He could not quite make up his mind.

“Well, what?” asked Mr. Swenson impatiently.

“Why,” Peter hesitated, “I think maybe selling the goods.”

Mr. Swenson shook his head several times rapidly.

“No, no, no. The means not the end. The means — I

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 104

might as well tell you: the most important thing in advertising is consumer contact. How can you sell goods if you don't know anything about the consumer?”

Peter turned this over in his mind. He was listening and thinking as hard as he could, trying to comprehend and store up every bit of information Mr. Swenson gave him. But he saw that Mr. Swenson was fidgeting.

“That's right, of course,” he said hurriedly.

“Maybe you don't know what my function in this company is,” said Mr. Swenson. “I'm head of the investigations department.”

He sounded even angry about it.

“The eyes of Dinwiddie and Company,” said Mr. Swenson. “This department finds out what to sell, where to sell it, and how. That's basic. After that the advertisements write themselves.”

“You mean the actual writing isn’t important?” asked Peter, who had prided himself somewhat on his writing ability at the University and had thought indeed that that was why he had gotten the job.

“Exactly,” said Mr. Swenson.

He rang a bell on his desk. Miss Borglund opened the door. She seemed very much sobered but avoided looking at Peter.

“Miss Borglund.”

“Yes, Mr. Swenson.”

“Take a letter ... Fibroid Paper account.”

The letter was to a prominent New York physician and asked for certain statements about piles.

“Send it air mail,” said Mr. Swenson when he had finished. “Or, no, wait a minute. Better wire it.”

“Yes, Mr. Swenson.”

Miss Borglund withdrew. Mr. Swenson drummed for a minute on the top of his desk. His eyes looked Peter

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 105

up, looked Peter down, then suddenly looked out the window.

“Now, Mr: Blenner,” he said, “suppose I asked you to put yourself in the place of a

housewife — a housewife who goes into a store looking for mustard.”

“Mustard?” questioned Peter.

“Mustard”, repeated Mr. Swenson sharply. “I suppose you’ve heard of housewives going into stores asking for mustard?”

“Well, yes.”

“Yes? Would you be able to put yourself in the place of such a housewife?”

“Yes,” said Peter.

“No, you wouldn’t.” Mr. Swenson looked bored. “No, you wouldn’t — not without you’d talked to some housewives about mustard first.”

Peter was silent.

“Now I used mustard for an example,” said Mr. Swenson, “because we happen to be investigating mustard at this time. We’re making a very important investigation for a new client of ours — a half-million dollar client, Mr. Blenner — and we think we can do something with mustard that has never been done before. But first we must know the housewife’s reaction to mustard. We must know what kind of mustard she uses *and* what brand, what she uses it for *and* how much — what she herself thinks of mustard — in short, everything that enters into the

housewife's conception of mustard. You can see how important that is."

Peter nodded. It certainly did sound important the way Mr. Swenson told about it. And "Advertising — a Modern Force" had said something of the same kind.

"At this very moment," Mr. Swenson continued, "we have trained investigators in every important city in the Northwest. From the reports these investigators turn in,

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 106

I working here with the assistance of my tabulators, will be able to visualize a housewife who reliably represents the attitudes of thousands of housewives toward mustard. We will have a true cross-section of mustard opinion in the U.S. We will not have to guess — we will know exactly and in detail what enters into the mustard consciousness of American housewives."

He paused impressively. His subject seemed to have carried him away; but then the instant he looked at Peter, he frowned once more.

"Now, Mr. Blenner, here's where you come in. First, look at these— " He handed Peter a little black notebook which contained a hundred or more mimeographed

questionnaires — "You see the questions. Kinds of mustard used. Brands of mustard. Amount consumed in a year. Comments — whatever new slants the housewife may give you on mustard. Now, tomorrow morning, I want you to take those questionnaires, select a good typical residential section of Minneapolis and make a house-to-house canvass, marking the results of the investigation in the spaces provided, for example: Do you use mustard? — Yes or no. Why? — the reason why. And so on. You'd better memorize the questions, too; because some people are nervous when you bring out a book like this. We've found that the best way is just to act casual about it, as though you were having a conversation about mustard and then slip in the questions wherever they would naturally occur,"

"You mean," said Peter rather agitated, "I walk right up to a door and—"

"Oh, you needn't worry," said Mr. Swenson. "You'll find them very nice. You'll find most of them just as interested in mustard as you are."

Peter smiled.

"There's nothing funny about it," said Mr. Swenson.

Peter stopped smiling abruptly.

"One of the vice presidents of this company," said Mr. Swenson impressively, "spent one whole week standing in front of a five-and-ten-cent store on Sixth Street, asking the people who came out why they'd gone in." Mr. Swenson paused. "Mr. Dinwiddie himself has been on investigations very much the same as the one I'm sending you out on. That's how important consumer contact is."

"Well, I'm certainly very interested in it," said Peter. "All I was thinking was that, being big as I am, people might think it sort of funny my going around asking about mustard. Of course, it doesn't make any difference to me. I was just thinking about the results—"

"The results will be tabulated here," said Mr. Swenson. "There can't be any error about that."

Peter was silent.

"Now since you're on an investigation," continued Mr. Swenson, "you may keep a list of your expenses such as car-fare—"

"Oh, I'll walk," said Peter, "I walk every place."

Mr. Swenson raised his eyebrows. "Walking takes time."

Peter flushed.

“Well, you see, street-cars aren’t exactly designed for me. But — I’m a very fast walker — ”

“At any rate, said Mr. Swenson, at any rate Mr. Blenner, it is customary for the company to pay only when you’re on an investigation, mind — such expenses as car expenses, lunch expenses” — he looked at Peter reflectively — ”though the allowance for lunch is seventy-five cents, Mr. Blenner— ”

At that minute the door of the office opened and Watson stuck his head in.

“Hello, Swennie. Got an idea!”

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 108

Mr. Swenson did not seem overly pleased.

“Yes? Yes? What?”

“Mustard!” said Watson. “Aphrodisiac!”

“Aphro-what?”

Watson came in and stood leaning against the filing cabinet.

“Aphrodisiac. Love, you know, passion.”

Mr. Swenson wrinkled up his nose.

“Oh now, Watson— ” he began.

“Dinwiddie says Oke,” interrupted Watson.

Mr. Swenson's nose unwrinkled. He showed a sudden interest.

"Just what is the idea, Watson? Let me have it."

"Thought you might be interested, said Watson. Here it is. You know Latins — Latin passion — Latin love — famous the world over — right? Well, *and* you know Latin foods — peppery — highly spiced — in short, mustard! You follow me?"

"Yes yes" said Mr. Swenson.

"All right — get out a Latin cookbook — advertise'. 'Under balmy skies passion throbs — Love's secrets in this magic cookbook.' Well, and in the cookbook — mustard recipes — our mustard! What do you think of it?"

"Dinwiddie likes it?" asked Mr. Swenson.

"Says go ahead. And think of the art-work, Swennie, Dazzling females, Venetian backgrounds, and the Jar prominently displayed in every ad. 'Gondolas glide through the scented night.' Everybody'll read. Sex-starved, middle-aged women worrying about middle-aged husbands — no longer the same old kick — solution: mustard. Our mustard!"

"Well, it does sound good," said Mr. Swenson. . .

“Good? It’s marvelous!” declared Watson enthusiastically.

There was a silence and they both looked at Peter seated on the floor. Peter felt constrained to murmur:

“Very interesting.”

At this Mr. Swenson frowned. Watson sighed.

“Well, Swennie, going along now. Ta, ta.”

“Wait a minute,” said Mr. Swenson. “Watson, why don’t you take Mr. Blenner and show him around? He may as well see the plant.”

“What!” cried Watson. He looked deeply injured. “What do you think I am, Swennie?”

“Well, what do you think I am?” Mr. Swenson replied.

There was a pause.

“I’m busy, Swennie. I’ve got my hands full,”

“So have I.”

Another pause.

“Oh, all right then,” said Watson with a very ill grace. “Come along, Blenner.”

Peter scrambled to his feet.

“Good-by,” he said to Mr. Swenson.

“Oh — good-by,” replied Mr. Swenson.

"These are offices all along here," said Watson in a melancholy voice.

"Yes," said Peter.

"Reception room," murmured Watson.

Peter nodded.

Watson threw open a door.

"Production department."

Peter bent to look in. A smallish room full of desks and people, very crowded and confused.

"Production?" Peter questioned.

"Mechanical," said Watson. "Sees the ads through. They take copy, art — bring back finished job."

"Oh, yes," said Peter, "copy! That's what I want to do."

Watson stared up at him for a moment in silence.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 110

"You *write*?"

"Yes — at least that's what I want to do."

Watson said nothing. By this time every one in the production department was looking at the two of them. Production was momentarily paralyzed. A man with his hair all on end, his coat off, and a worried expression, came hurrying up to them.

"Hello, Doc," said Watson.

“Take him away! Take him away! Christ’s sake, can’t you see we’re busy?”

“Maybe you think you’re the only ones?” replied Watson sadly.

As they walked on, Peter apologized:

“I’m sorry to take up so much of your time.”

“Oh, that’s all right,” said Watson.

“Billing department,” said Watson. “Shipping department.”

“Experimental kitchen... Hello, Mrs. Flannery.”

Mrs. Flannery was a broad, shiny-faced woman in an apron. Her experimental kitchen was so small that Peter could get only his head into it.

“Well, as I live and breathe!” cried Mrs. Flannery. “Here it is!”

“This is Mr. Blenner, Mrs. Flannery,” said Watson.

“As I live and breathe!” repeated Mrs. Flannery.

“Got anything?” Watson asked her.

“Why, yes, I’ve been trying out that molasses recipe — cookies. Very good.”

Watson ate two of them judiciously, gloomily, then gave Mrs. Flannery his opinion of them. Peter ate six because Mrs. Flannery

insisted on it. She seemed fascinated by the way he chewed, swallowed.

“Good woman,” said Watson as they walked away.

“Art department.”

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 111

The art department was very modern with square over-head lights. The first thing Peter did was to bang his head into one of them and crack it. Two of the artists cheered at this. Two others looked indignant. Peter was overcome with confusion.

“I’m — I’m very sorry.”

Watson didn’t seem concerned in any way. He was talking to the fifth art director. After a minute he beckoned to Peter.

“What do you think of him, Tuppy?”

Tuppy was a tall slender boy with wavy brown hair. He looked Peter all over very carefully.

“Well, I’ll tell you,” he said at last, “I hadn’t *seen* the Lozier Giant just that way.”

“No?” said Watson; disappointed. “Still — might give ideas.”

Tuppy puckered his lips.

“Well, maybe!”

One of the two art directors who had cheered was doing a sketch of Peter while the other one leaned over his shoulder laughing. Peter tried to smile good naturedly.

"I suppose the copy men and the art directors work very close together?" he asked.

"Not so very," said Watson. "Well, come along."

They went down a long passage which was hung with gold-framed pictures of hams, cans of maple syrup, dressy women.

"Art," said Watson, "all art."

They came to a row of offices, very much smaller than any of the others Peter had seen, a row of very small cells glass-inclosed.

"Now here's where the copy-men work."

"Really?" Peter was very interested.

"And here's my office."

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 112

Watson opened a door. Though the office was so tiny, there were two desks in it.

"I'm afraid I wouldn't even be able to get in," said Peter, smiling.

Watson did not seem to hear.

"I'll tell you, Blenner," said he, "I've got a lot of work to do. Suppose you sit over in the corner of the hall there. I'll give you some of

my old stuff to look at. Learn a lot that way. Get ideas.”

“All right,” said Peter.

Watson rummaged in his desk and came out. with a handful of proof sheets of different advertisements.

“I suppose you’re going to work on that mustard idea now,” Peter ventured. “I was interested in that.”

“Yes,” said Watson.

“Mr. Swenson was going to send me out to ask about mustard tomorrow... I suppose now they’ll give me something else to do.”

Watson stared at him.

“Why?”

“Why, because you already have your idea for mustard.”

“Oh,” said Watson. “That doesn’t make any difference. They’ll finish the investigation up. Consumer contact. Looks good to the client.”

“Don’t you believe in it?” Peter asked.

“It’s all right,” murmured Watson. “But sex counts. Put sex into everything. Soap, machinery — hang anything on sex. I hung Wabash Rugs on sex. It worked like a charm. And now mustard — the same way. Everything sex.”

“Just how do you mean?” asked Peter.

“Now, Blenner,” said Watson, “suppose you sit down in the corner there and look through that old stuff of mine. Learn a lot that way. I’ve got twenty pieces of copy— ” Without finishing the sentence, he retired into his little

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 113

office and closed the door. Peter sat down in the corner of the hall indicated and began to look through the advertisements. They were on every conceivable subject and they all seemed to have been written with great haste. Peter found many things which looked like mistakes. And though he was no judge, it seemed to him that in a few cases sex had been stretched a bit.

As Watson did not reappear, and as there seemed nothing else for him to do, he spent all the rest of the morning until luncheon seated on the floor in the narrow hall corner with his legs drawn up beneath him and the little pile of advertisements on his knee.

3

Peter’s first day in business had exhausted him. He walked home with a dragging step.

On the lawn outside his father's house, he paused a minute, breathing heavily. In spite of his tremendous physique, such experiences as today's would completely wear him down. Of course there was the strain of bending, bowing, going sidewise through narrow passages, going through doors, maneuvering so as not to knock things over. But it was even more a mental strain. When he talked to people like Mr. Swenson, he felt that he had constantly to hold himself in, even though he was quite conscious that it sometimes made him look stupid and ineffectual. If he was forceful, people were scared or antagonized. If he even laughed in anything like a hearty manner, other people would stop laughing themselves to stare at him. And once in a classroom when he had sneezed, a little girl in front of him had fainted — passed out cold.

At the University he had used to go into the gymnasium

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 114

every afternoon and work himself into a lather, pulling weights, running. He could lift a three hundred pound weight with one hand above his head. Though he was no good in sprints, he could run a mile in exceedingly

fast time. Now he missed these daily outlets of surplus energy, excess steam.

The lawn in front of his father's house was wide and long, sloping down toward the Lake of the Isles boulevard on which the house fronted. Beyond the boulevard, tiny inlets of the lake were visible through the trees and spiny bushes which bordered it. In Peter's mother's day this lake had been a swamp; but then the city had dredged it out and made a springy, artificial turf grow all along the edges and planted the trees and the spiny bushes.

A few cars went past along the boulevard, noiseless, shadowy in the early autumn dusk. There were the smells of their exhausts and of burning leaves nearby, and a moist smell from the lake. Peter sighed several times, standing motionless in front of the house; he could not make up his mind to go in. He heard the telephone ringing; then lights Bashed on in the living room. He saw Mrs. Williams standing near the window holding the phone. She looked colder than he had ever remembered her. A cold wind like a blizzard seemed to blow out from her, straight through the window, chilling the whole outer atmosphere. Now she put the receiver down on the phone and stood a minute staring out

— directly at him, he thought. So he nodded and lifted his hat to her, but she turned abruptly away from the window and passed out of sight. He decided that she had not seen him. It was already quite dark outside.

The living room looked cold and rather shiny, seen through the small square panes of the windows. It was a long room, very low-ceiled. Although when they were building the house, Mrs. Williams had made it seem that

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 115

the whole was being constructed especially for Peter so that he might have a room of his own in which he would be comfortable, she had insisted upon exaggerated Early American low ceilings, seven foot ceilings in every other room. Now when Peter came in the front door of his father's house, he had to bend right over until his hands hung below his knees. He would go stooping this way through the low front hall, feeling apelike and absurd. In the well of the staircase he would be able to straighten a little but when he got into the upstairs hall, he would have to bend far over again; and here the hall was so narrow that his shoulders scraped the flowered wall-paper on either side. Once

started down the hall toward his room, he was as if in a tunnel. He could not straighten and he could not turn around. On one occasion, shortly after the house was built, his father had come running down the hall and had given him a kick behind; then had laughed so light-heartedly, with such a return of his old manner, that Peter had joined in laughing, too. But his father, tickled, had tried the stunt another time when Mrs. Williams and Seth Williams were with him, watching. Peter had started up furiously, jamming his head and shoulders against the ceiling, growling:

“Let me alone! What’s the matter with you!”

Peter’s room was at the very end of the hall in the rear of the house. The door to it was as small as any of the others opening off the hall; it was only six feet high and two and a half feet wide, thoroughly Early American. Peter had to push his head and shoulders in sidewise, then pull the rest of his body in after. Once inside, however, he was in a different world.

Though he had made up his mind not to like the room, from the first day he had seen it he had been unable to deny its charms. In ordinary rooms he was conscious of

the walls and ceiling as a man is conscious of a too-small suit of underwear, tight and confining. In his new room there was plenty of space for all his movements. He could stand upright, straighten his back, flex his muscles, step about freely; yet there were the four walls and the ceiling insuring privacy.

Of course one result of the way the house had been planned, was that his appearances in any other part of it were rare. Although he knew that this was the end Mrs. Williams had worked for, he did not particularly resent it. He much preferred being apart from them. Neither Mrs. Williams nor he had ever paid much attention to his father when his father would say: "Come on, young fellow, you eat downstairs tonight. We'll cut a hole in the floor for your feet."

Sometimes in the evenings after dinner — because he wanted to be polite to Mrs. Williams as Mrs. Williams was always polite to him — Peter had used to go down and sit in the living room with them — with his father and Mrs. Williams and with Seth Williams during the vacations when Seth Williams was back from Harvard. He would come into the low room bent over, moving cautiously, and

pause for a minute near the doorway looking down at them. They would be sitting in three small chairs in a small circle in front of the fireplace. The three of them would be sipping coffee out of three cups no bigger than thimbles. Mrs. Williams would always rise ceremoniously to greet him and she would invariably offer him coffee which he would refuse. The room was large though it had such a low ceiling. It was rather sparsely furnished. There was one big circular rug which had a design of small flowers endlessly repeated. Outside the area of the rug the dark floor gleamed, highly polished. Everything was so neat; all the antiques looked neat. Yet, while he stood,

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 117

bent from the waist, as if in unwilling obeisance, his shoulder blades flat against the ceiling, he would be looking past them all, above Mrs. Williams' neat gray hair to the top of an old cabinet, which he had noticed in the evenings before. The top of this old cabinet which must have been invisible to any one but him was covered with dust, though its front was so neat; mixed in with the dust were an old rubber band and a crumpled piece of

paper. He wondered how these things had ever got there and he wondered why they were never removed; but every evening it was a relief to find them still intact, above Mrs. Williams' unconscious head, the rubber band and the crumpled piece of paper and of course there was more and more dust all the time. So, after this inspection, feeling rather pleased, he would lower himself carefully down upon a stiff settle which was the only seat of any kind in the room big enough to hold him. He would sit there as long as he was able to and Mrs. Williams would talk, and Seth Williams would talk, and he and his father would be silent.

But since he had graduated and had been looking for a job, he had hardly gone near the living room. He did not want to quarrel with Mrs. Williams; on the other hand he had no desire to listen to her constant hints about France and novel-writing. Perhaps — he thought — his having a job now would put an end to that.

As he opened the front door, he heard the telephone ringing again somewhere in the rear of the house, and he could hear voices in the living room, Mrs. Williams and Seth. He went as quietly as he could past the open

living-room door. Mrs. Williams was talking in an unusually loud though cold voice:

“Oh, I think it’s loathsome. People calling up all day — people I have never even heard of — Couldn’t he have realized how impossible for us — how—” Then Seth put

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 118

in: “An inevitable result. Inevitable— ” And he could picture Seth leaning slightly forward, his big head on one side his mouth slightly open.

He wondered what they were talking about but he had no desire to find out. The less he entered into the affairs of this house, the better satisfied he was. He went quickly up the stairs and down the hall to his room. As he bent low to go through the door, he noticed the maid, Jeanne standing at the other end of the hall, looking at him. He went in and closed the door. It was always a relief to him to reach his own room, to close the door on the rest of the house. Now he felt suddenly deliciously drowsy. He began to yawn and stretch. He took off his hat, loosened his collar, and lay down on the bed. He dropped almost instantly asleep. Often when tired out by experiences which would not have been at all tiring to a

normal-sized person, he would take a nap this way before dinner.

He had been asleep perhaps ten minutes when the extension telephone in his room began ringing. It rang and rang. Lying stretched out full length on the bed, he stirred but did not waken.

The telephone looked like a child's candy telephone and its' ringing sounded faint in this room where nearly everything else was to his measure. The very desk the telephone sat on — a plain table desk — was a tremendous one of oak, raised so high from the floor that a smallish man could have walked underneath it without stooping.

The ceiling in the room was twelve feet high. There was a full length mirror ten feet high. There was a high roomy closet. In the bathroom was a toilet seat twice ordinary size, which a firm in Milwaukee had once used for display purposes.

Above the desk hung a photograph of his mother in evening dress, and the photograph of his graduating class at

the Dunham School with himself seated in the front row, his knees coming forward out of

the picture, seeming to grow larger and larger so that they took up all one side of the picture. There was Charley's face smirking over the rim of one knee and the face of another boy whose father was a millionaire, peering around the side of the other knee. His own face in the center between the two immense knee-caps was alone undwarfed by them. He had a kind of smile on his lips and his eyes were looking sidewise at Charley who must have said something extremely funny, to judge from the expressions of the boys all around him.

Beside the desk was a built-in wooden bookcase reaching to the ceiling. All his favorite books were in the upper shelves: Tolstoi's "Kreutzer Sonata," Gautier's "Mademoiselle de Maupin," Flaubert's "Madame Bovary," Cabell's "Jurgen," Daudet's "Sapho," and the University of Minnesota Annual of which he had been Humor Editor under Charley as Managing Editor, before their graduation. On the lower shelves was a jumble of books which had been given him, books in fine print which he could not read, books of India paper, the pages of which his fingers were entirely unable to separate. Of all his favorite novels he had bought the biggest

print editions, printed on the coarsest paper. Yet he always had to hold them very close and sometimes to use a magnifying glass, though there was nothing the matter with his eyes. Often he would become furious with pages which stuck together. Much of his library had a mangled look.

Next the bookcase was the easy chair in which he customarily read; it was rather larger than a sofa — a kind of Morris chair designed by a local furniture dealer. His father had had it made for him, while he was living in his fraternity house at the University during his Sophomore year. It had become something of a Campus tradition.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 120

Students belonging to other fraternities had used to get themselves invited to his fraternity house especially to look at it, to see him seated in it. In speaking of girls with unusual hip development, they would allude to this chair— “She’d fill Pete Blenner’s chair!” — and the remark would be understood by almost any one of the four or five thousand students.

Beside the chair, dwarfed by it, was an ordinary-sized table which looked like a round

footstool. The table had a shelf below; on it he kept his cigars which he always smoked in public and the cigarettes which he preferred in private. There was a box of kitchen matches, too, the magnifying glass, and the magnet with which he would take pins out of his shirts when they came back from the laundry.

The telephone had given up its unequal struggle. Peter slept on, snoring gently.

Now there came a tapping at the hall door. The tapping kept up, slow, persistent. Peter turned over on his side.

“Come in,” he called, still half asleep.

The maid Jeanne came in, carrying an immense loaded tray which contained his dinner. She set it down on the round table next the chair. As she straightened up she gave a groan and placed one hand on her back but this was according to her custom and Peter paid no attention.

“Well, Jeanne,” he said, yawning, “what time is it?”

Jeanne retreated into the hall before she made him any answer. She stood, looking at him through the doorway as if she thought he might bite.

“Eet’s seven.”

Though Jeanne was a French maid — a real French maid — Peter sometimes thought of her as Early American, too. She so perfectly represented the new regime in his father's new house. Jeanne had been imported to Minneapolis

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 121

originally by one of the younger Pillmans as part of a French ménage for her French château at Lake Minnetonka; but later this younger Pillman had changed her mind in favor of an English butler with English supernumeraries. Mrs. Williams had snapped up Jeanne at that time and had retained her ever since. Jeanne was a very good maid, neat, efficient, vaguely mustachioed. "Why don't you talk French to her, Ah — Peter?" Mrs. Williams had said once. "It will be such an advantage to you when you go to France." "But I'm not going to France—" It was doubtful if he would have learned much from Jeanne anyway. Jeanne decidedly did not trust him. She had never been able to get used to him nor to any of his ways. It was only in connection with him that Mrs. Williams' discipline ever wavered. Jeanne always objected to making up his bed. It was so heavy she couldn't move it,

she said; and it was such trouble keeping his special sheets and blankets and pillow cases separate from the rest. It actually strained her arms lifting his heavy suits and putting them on their hangers. Once she had injured herself badly stumbling over a shoe of his; and she evidently looked upon his toilet seat as something obscene. Mrs. Williams would always tighten her lips placating Jeanne.

“Somebodee phone you,” Jeanne announced.

“What?” He sat up straight. “Who?”

He noticed that though her face wore its customary expression of sullen foreboding, she looked vaguely amused, too. The corners of her mouth twitched.

“Somebodee. I don’ know.”

“Why didn’t you call me?”

She said nothing.

“Don’t you know who it was, Jeanne?”

Now she spoke very distinctly, as she could when she wanted to.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 122

“People been phoneeng all the day.”

He laughed.

“I didn’t know I was so popular.”

But her words and the way she emphasized them made him recollect the conversation he had heard between Mrs. Williams and Seth Williams as he came in.

“What about it, Jeanne?”

She did not answer.

“Do you know what they wanted, Jeanne?”

“Ave you seen the paper?” she asked suddenly.

“Why, no,” he said, surprised.

“The paper tonight.” She motioned with one thumb toward the tray. “Madame Blenner sent eet.”

He glanced at the tray and saw there was a paper tucked in between the water-jug and a big covered bowl of vegetables; he jumped to his feet; then he looked at her suspiciously.

“Well, you can go now,” he said.

For a minute she lingered in the doorway, as if reluctant to leave; then, still smiling vaguely she withdrew and closed the door.

He glanced once more at the paper. For some reason he felt loath to pick it up. Why should Mrs. Williams send him a paper? It wasn't like her to send him anything he reflected — except a stick of dynamite perhaps.

The paper was rather rumpled. He spread it out in his hands but for a minute he did not look at it. When he did, he saw that some one had marked with blue pencil a picture and an article in the center of the page. It was a picture of himself standing with Charley on the fraternity house steps. He was just standing there, rather reserved, smiling, but Charley was executing a kind of dance step, one leg kicked up and a hand above his head. The picture had run in the University Annual with the caption: "The

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 123

Long and Short of it." But this headline read: "Biggest Advertising Man in the World — Local Freak Joins Dinwiddie Staff."

His heart began to beat very fast. After a minute he circled his lips with his tongue. He looked at himself in the mirror and saw that his face was perfectly red.

"Well, Jesus Christ," he mumbled stupidly, "Jesus Christ."

Now his hands were shaking a little so that he had to sit down in his chair to read the rest. He held the paper very close to his eyes and with one big finger he traced out the tiny type: "A local advertising firm today added to its

staff what is certainly the biggest advertising man in the world. Mr. Dinwiddie, President of the Company, told newspaper reporters today..." Farther down the column was a box of bolder type with a border around it, headed: Some Startling Facts About Local Freak." Then followed the facts. "Height: 9 feet six inches — weight: 550 pounds — " He reflected that these were both lies, exaggerations. "Collar: measures three feet around — Shoes (gunboat model): 22 inches — Hat — "

Some of the facts were accurate, some more or less exaggerated. But. there was plenty of information upon every conceivable point. Even his mother was mentioned: "His mother was perfectly normal. His father, well-known realtor, still living, measures five feet six inches in height..." There was plenty of humor, too: "Young Mr. Blenner himself is said to understand and enjoy all the humor of his peculiar situation. Innumerable pranks at the University where ..." "One of the office boys at Dinwiddie and Company expressed himself..."

This was not his first experience of publicity. Once a manufacturer from whom he had ordered some gloves had

photographed one of them with a prize Pekingese in it,

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 124

the pug nose sticking out. Papers all over the country had run this picture with Peter's name and the name of the Pekingese. At the University, the student paper had been constantly printing stories about him.

Why should this seem so different?

He had finished reading but he still kept the paper up close to his eyes. And his eyes still picked out words here and there from the column he had read — "Freak," "Behemoth," "Up above the world so high."

He clenched his fists suddenly and the newspaper crackled. He felt that his face was covered with perspiration.

"Oh, now wait a minute. Wait a minute," he told himself. "Keep your shirt on. Keep—"

4

Dressed very formally in evening clothes, Peter and Charley sat in Peter's room at the fraternity house in the late afternoon, drinking and talking. The occasion was that of

the annual fraternity banquet and reunion in January. Peter sat on his roll of blankets on the floor, Charley on a chair in front of him. The bed had been taken out of the room several months before when Peter moved in.

“I noticed it downstairs,” said Charley, “the minute I saw you. You’re looking tired, Pete. You’re looking like you say, down at the mouth.”

Peter closed his eyes and leaned his head against the wall, letting the words pour out of him violently, volubly. It was so long since he had had any one in whom he could confide.

“That newspaper thing was bad enough, Charley — bad enough — and that bitch my father married ringing it into

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 125

me like that! That’s why I came to the fraternity house to live, you know. I couldn’t stand it at home. At first I had it in my head to give up the job too. I wanted to sit down on my tail right then and throw up the whole God-damned works. Well, maybe it would have been just as good if I had. Everything was planted against me No one. wanted to give me a chance. There was a regular — well, a regular conspiracy against me. That old

bastard of a Dinwiddie was just playing with me. He must have known that publicity would start me off all wrong.”

Though he was in such a close, confidential mood and a little drunk perhaps too, Peter had nevertheless avoided all mention of the fact that three circuses and one vaudeville circuit had made him offers as a result of the publicity.

“Well, it’s been the same way ever since. If I do something wrong, they don’t tell me so I can know what’s what. They just laugh about it: That’s what they expect. But suppose I do something good. That happens, you know. Suppose I have an idea — like that idea I had about Fibroid toilet paper — by God they’re shocked. It hurts them Charley. They just turn away their heads and shut their cars and shut their eyes, too. They’re scandalized, Charley.”

Peter paused for breath and Charley commented:

“Well, that was a good idea you had for Fibroid toilet paper. That was good.”

“Good? It was marvelous! ... But do you suppose they’d give it a chance, when I thought it up?”

Charley scratched his head.

“Well, I’ll tell you, Pete, they’re always shy of taking ideas from a new man, you know.”

“Sure. Sure. They’re shy, sure — but they’ll take them. With me its different. I wish to God I could make you understand the way they’ve got things organized against

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 126

me. It — it’s a real conspiracy, Charley. I think they’re afraid of me in a way.”

Charley burst out laughing, holding his whisky glass away from his mouth.

“No reason why they shouldn’t be, Pete old boy.”

Peter flushed deeply.

“No reason why they should be either. I don’t go around socking people on the nose in business, you know. God damn it all, Charley, we aren’t kids any more.”

Charley nodded.

“That’s right, Pete.”

Peter took a long drink, emptying his glass. He fitted the glass over his finger snug as a thimble and tapped it up and down on his knee while he talked.

“As a matter of fact, maybe that’s the secret of the whole thing. We aren’t kids any more. Living here at the fraternity house this winter

has made me see that. Christ, I feel like a leftover. When we were all together here it was different. Then I got along all right. I was pretty happy. Remember how we used to joke, about. the four best years of a young man's life? Well, I'm beginning to realize now that they were good years after all. I've never gotten along with people so well in my life as I did then. Remember how boys used to come in and look at my special chair? They thought it was fine. And everything I'd say they'd laugh at whether it was funny or not — just because I had a reputation for a sense of humor, I guess. You know how serious I am, Charley. I never would have told a joke in my life if there had been any other way to get along. I'm not like you. You're naturally humorous."

Charley wrinkled up his forehead as he had always used to do when he would tell Peter: "I'm in love."

"Oh, I'm pretty serious underneath, Pete."

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 127

"Well, but not as serious as I am," said Peter. "When these little new kids they've got into the fraternity now laugh at me, or when I say something serious at the office and they laugh

at me, then I want to kill them. And they always do laugh at me, Charley, that's part of the conspiracy. Maybe it was my fault for ever being humorous. But I don't think so, Charley. Sometimes I want to yell at them — you God-damned bastards! what's so funny?"

"Well, you're too sensitive, Pete," said Charley. "Christ! people will laugh at anything they haven't been used to from the cradle up."

"I know it, and I know I'm foolish about it. I keep telling myself not to be a fool. And I tell myself, the God-damned runts look as funny to me as I do to them."

Charley was silent, seeming a little puzzled. Peter said softly, "You see, that's what I keep telling myself to keep my courage up but it's not so good when they're a million to one all the time. Besides, I guess I've been extra-sensitive lately. There's absolutely no one at the office that isn't against me — some way against me. Even the good-natured ones — by God! I think I hate them the worst. Then in the evenings there isn't any one either. I spend every evening just sitting around this God-damned fraternity house. You've been away in Chicago, you see — thank God you're going to be back now for a while. Leo and all the boys we went around with have been hard at work

of course — and in the evenings chasing girls — which lets me out, of course, being a woman-hater. Some of them are even married. And then these new fellows they've gotten into the fraternity here — the old place isn't the same, Charley. Nothing's the same. I don't mind telling you, it — it's God-damned lonely sometimes."

Charley was silent. After a minute he got up, took his

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 128

bottle of whisky off the bureau and filled his glass, then Peter's glass.

"Well, that's tough, Pete."

Peter felt softened and suddenly closer to Charley. As they sat here, the two of them, together in the small bare room with the pleasant glow of whisky in them and their shirt fronts white and starchy and the room filling with the quick wintry dusk, they seemed closer to each other than they had ever been before.

Suddenly Charley said:

"You know, I think if I were you, I'd go back home, Pete!"

"Oh, no," Peter said. "Oh, no. That's over. I know when I'm not wanted."

“—or into a boarding house!”

“I’ve asked a couple of places but they — well, they wouldn’t take me. Too much trouble.”

Charley was silent.

“Well, anyway,” he said at last, “I don’t see why you shouldn’t make a go of it in business — you’ve got three times the brains of the average damned fool.”

Peter emptied his whisky glass and set it down on the floor.

“Maybe,” he said, “maybe. Sometimes I think if I’d been born dumber I’d have gotten along better. I see things pretty clearly, you know. And I’ve got the feeling now that every one’s against me. Christ, you can’t buck a conspiracy all your life without going sour on it.”

“Well, try another business!”

“Sure, I’ve thought of that. But I don’t see how it would be any better. I’ve got a feeling they’re all against me now.”

“Well, for that matter,” said Charley, “why worry about a job at all just now. Your old man’s got plenty jack. You—”

But Peter looked at him so fiercely that he didn't go on.

"Now you sound just like that bitch my father married," Peter said after a pause.

Charley laughed.

"Well, God damn it all, Pete, there must be some way out."

For a time they were both silent. At last Peter spoke heavily:

"I'm not so sure there is a way out. I've thought it over and over and I can't see anything. Here's the whole trouble. I'm a perfectly normal person, you know that. But I'm nine feet two inches tall. Well, what's the result? People won't believe I'm normal. They're bound to play me up as not being normal — publicity and so on — and then of course after that they're even more convinced I'm not normal."

"But wait a minute, Pete," said Charley, holding up his hand as he would do sometimes when he was about to have an inspiration. "You may be normal but you are nine feet two inches tall."

"Why, sure."

"Well, then!" Charley leaned forward suddenly, his round frog-eyes ablaze. "Now let me tell you something, Pete. I've only been in

business a few months. And I don't say I'm setting the world on fire. But I know the tricks. And one of the first of them is this: capitalize what you've got. Now you may think I sound like a business correspondence school after the talks we used to have, but I'm talking facts now. And that's one of them. I'm not saying that newspaper business wasn't a pretty stiff dose for you at first, account of home complications and so on. But that publicity oughtn't to have done you any harm. Why; good God, that's what we're all looking for in business. If I could have had a front page story about me when

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 130

I went into insurance, do you suppose I wouldn't have jumped at it?"

Peter said nothing. He was looking down at the floor.

"Now, Pete, I'm talking to you this way because I like you," said Charley. "And you know what good friends we've always been. But away in Chicago I haven't seen you for almost a half year now and I've maybe learned something in that time. Anyway it seems to me what you need is getting out there and

saying, 'Here I am. Look me over. I'm a giant and I'm proud of it.'"

"Why, I am proud of it," said Peter quickly, scowling at Charley. "I'm God-damned proud of it."

"Then capitalize it," said Charley.

He jumped up from his chair and poured himself another drink from the bottle; then picked up Peter's glass from the floor and filled that, too. At last he smiled at Peter.

"Well, what do you say, Pete, old boy?"

Peter spoke slowly, and very low, looking at his whisky glass on the floor, like an amber-colored bubble upon the amber-colored strips of wood.

"Of course, I'm a giant. That's perfectly right. That's what a giant is — a perfectly normal person — only big." Charley was nodding his head up and down, up and down in solemn agreement. "Only I'm not a freak. I'm a real giant. There's nothing freakish about me."

"Why of course not," said Charley, without for a minute interrupting the nods of his head. "Of course not."

"I guess a giant can be a giant without being a freak," said Peter, looking hard at Charley.

“Why, sure.”

“Well, I think I’ve always been proud of being a giant, a real giant. Only maybe it never would have occurred to me to capitalize it the way you say. As a

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 131

matter of fact, I’ve always felt — well, for various reasons, Charley — that my being so big was — in fact, I was scared of it. That was aside from not wanting to be a freak, of course.”

“Of course,” said Charley.

“Well, but maybe you’re right. Maybe you’re right. Maybe I’ve just been sort of half-alive all the time and that’s why they’ve ridden it into me the way they have at the office. People are — well — they’re not very God-damned considerate, Charley. To say the least.”

Charley rested his hand impulsively on Peter’s shoulder.

“Oh, come on, Pete, old man. Cheer up!”

Peter sat for a time silent, then sighed, and looked at Charley.

“You’ve got no idea how much it’s meant talking things over. You’re the only one I can talk to seriously, Charley.”

Charley gave his shoulder another pat. Peter felt that they were both very near to tears in this sentimental mood.

“Let’s have a drink,” said Charley.

Peter downed his in one gulp again, though it was fiery stuff. Then he went over to the window and bent double, looking out between the curtains at the vacant lot next door, snowy white in the blue dusk.

“Well, anyway,” said Charley, “this is going to be some party tonight. It’ll be great to see all the boys again.”

Peter swung around suddenly and faced him, looking down.

“I’m going to do what you say. I’m a giant and I’m proud of it. I’ll capitalize it right up to the limit, by God.”

Charley took a step across the room and turned a light switch. The light went on, shedding a warm yellow radiance over the bare room, the bureau and the roll of blankets on the floor. They both blinked. Peter poured

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 132

himself two drinks in rapid succession — two giant’s gulps.

“I’m a giant and I’m proud of it!”

Charley stood looking up at him, barely five feet seven and prematurely pot-bellied, his frog eyes shining.

“Good for you, old man.”

He reached up his hand and shook Peter’s warmly.

“Well; now, I guess we’re all set for the party.”

“A real party,” Peter said.

Charley emptied what was left of the bottle into his flask and put it in his pocket, winking at Peter. Then they went out down the long, dark hall toward the stairs. Charley went first and Peter followed him side-wise, through the narrow hall.

There were already a number of men downstairs. They stood about the big room in a haze of blue and yellow smoke — older alumni, men of affairs — those who were still students — and three or four who had been members of the same class as Peter and Charley, back for their first reunion. These gathered quickly around Charley, shaking hands with him and with Peter. Others came up, laughing and jumping high in the air to slap Peter on the back. Peter noticed several older alumni who had once refused him jobs.

But tonight they were all good fellows together.

Peter gave up trying to follow the conversation of Charley and the others in the little group below him. All he could see of them was the tops of their heads and such a babble of conversation rose to him from them and from the other groups in the room that he was conscious of no words, but only of a kind of pleasant confusion. He felt flushed and warm from the whisky he had been drinking, and warm and friendly from his recent closeness to Charley. He stood, swaying slightly and smiling, gazing down at all the heads bobbing up and down

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 133

in the blue smoke beneath him — bald heads and hairy, smooth hair and curly — and a few upturned faces, slightly awry, looking up at him. He thought once again:

“I’m a giant and I’m proud of it!”

He had always liked this room with its beams so dusty that any sudden straightening of his head would brush down a cloud, the imitation leather which varied the wood-paneling on the walls, the stucco fireplace with the two immense brass spittoons he had

polished as a Freshman, the moose head above the fireplace which he had had to call "Brother" and embrace affectionately during his initiation, the leather-cushioned settees and leather-covered chairs, all worn and dirty, torn and patched — even the one which had collapsed under him one night at a Smoker, now repaired again and braced, still in service. And the curious smell, especially noticeable up near the ceiling, a smell such as he had never encountered in any other place and which filled him with a nostalgia for all those former days which he fancied to himself now as carefree, a multiple smell, compound of tobacco, cooking, boys coming in in sweat shirts, boys coming in drunk.

"Well, Pete," every one said when they came up to greet him, "and how's the air up there?"

And he was conscious of certain alumni who had never before seen him but had only heard of him, craning their necks. They stammered when they were introduced to him, none of them knowing quite what to say.

He grinned and grinned, his head swaying slightly between two dusty beams. For he felt so warm and friendly. They were all such good fellows together. Maybe it was just for one night. But it was good. People kept coming in

all the time. One older alumnus was quietly spirited away and put to bed upstairs, and several of the Freshmen

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 134

were becoming hilarious despite the disapproval of their elders.

The banquet had been fixed for seven o'clock. In a little while now they would all be leaving the fraternity house and driving to the Latos Club in St. Paul. The fraternity had leased the Latos Club for the banquet, because drinking was not allowed in the fraternity house. It was going to be a grand party. The official invitations had as every year stressed sobriety, but there wasn't an empty hip-pocket in the place. And all the long row of cars whose lights could be seen outside through the big bay windows had liquor in their pockets, too.

"Hi, Pete, how's the air up there?"

It was Leo, leaning far back to look up at him and wobbling, his blue eyes on fire behind steel-rimmed glasses. Leo never could stand liquor, too nervous, excitable. Now he let out a long cackle, soprano, but very male.

"Where's the private limousine tonight, Pete? Dad was going to send one up for you."

Leo's father was in the moving business. Now Leo was, too, and doing very well, Peter had heard. He wore a soft shirt with his dinner coat and looked comfortable and prosperous.

"The covered wagon!" said Peter.

Leo laughed, throwing back his head, showing Peter a brief vista of convulsed pink gullet.

"Well, it's the same old Pete! Lord, how I wish we had you on our piano-gang."

"Maybe that's the kind of work I need," said Peter.

"Sure," said Leo. He became serious suddenly, as he could, like a choir boy. "But say, what I really meant to tell you was, you're going to drive over in my car to the club — Charley is, too. We'll make it the old threesome, eh?"

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 135

You can have the back seat to yourself. What are you bringing?"

"One hogshead," said Peter.

Immediately Leo went off into a cackle.

"And I've got a cork to smell!"

He became serious again in his surprising way.

“Say, isn’t it nice,” he said emphatically, his blue eyes celestial behind their steel-rimmed glasses, “to get back and see all the fellows again? You know, we fellows living in the city ought to get together oftener. I haven’t seen you for — Lord! it must be a couple of months. It’s the old grind, you know — work all day, feel too tired to go out at night. How’s the advertising business?”

Peter hesitated.

“Why,” he began.

But at that moment Charley came up, and Leo put his arm around Charley.

“His nibs,” Leo cackled, pretending to introduce Charley to Peter.

The two of them stood arm in arm, looking up at Peter, and he wished with a sudden surprising force that he could put his arm through theirs.

“Well, let’s go, fellows,” somebody yelled in a loud, authoritative voice.

There was a general rush for overcoats, hats. The room emptied itself in a surprisingly short time. They all went trooping out the front door and down to the cars. Leo and Charley were among the first out, but Peter had to wait for the room to clear a little before he could get to his overcoat and put it on. He

went out last onto the concrete porch between the concrete pillars, and paused for a minute between two of the pillars, looking at the dark row of cars, some of which were already roaring out from the curb over the clean-packed snow. He could see the huge

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 136

shapeless bulk of the University Armory just across the street. The air was cold and as he breathed it in, he seemed to taste all the tobacco he had been smoking and the whisky he had been drinking. He paused just an instant in the gloom between the two tall pillars, then he went out down the three concrete steps to the walk, down the slippery walk between high-piled banks of snow.

All the boys in the fraternity house next door were standing out on their porch, bareheaded, yelling.

“Hi, Pete,” they yelled the instant he appeared.

Then one of them yelled:

“Give us a salute, Pete! Dip the old flag!”

He turned promptly and took off his hat — a surprising gesture, and it had always been a favorite around the University — and waved it in the air, high as the second story windows, it

seemed. Then, while they all cheered, he went with his swinging stride down the icy sidewalk, past the parked cars and leaning down to look into some of them, looking for Leo.

At last he heard Charley calling through the confusion of starting motors, klaxons, shouts.

It was a good-sized sedan. Leo and Charley were sitting in the front seat and there was some one in the back seat — Ronny.

“Well, now, where am I going to sit?” drawled Ronny.

“There’s the tire-rack,” suggested Leo. Leo never had any use for Ronny. “Let’s go! Let’s go! We got to get there tonight, you know.”

Ronny got out of the car looking a little vexed but unruffled, the velvet collar of his black coat turned up, his sleek, black hair gleaming. He wore no hat, though it was so cold.

“Wait a minute, Ronny,” Peter said. He felt apologetic.

“Oh, Ronny will wait,” he heard Leo whisper.

Peter got into the car carefully, going sidewise through the door, then pulling

himself down into the tonneau, until he was half lying along the back seat, braced on his elbow, his head just beneath the padded top on one side, his but-tocks cramped tight against the other side, his legs drawn up to get his feet in, and his knees pressed against the front seat, steadying himself.

“For God’s sake don’t sneeze!” Leo cackled.

There was left a little space between Peter’s legs, the seat and his feet — a kind of nest.

“All right, Ronny,” he grunted.

Ronny promptly climbed in and sat on one of Peter’s feet. He sat calmly while Charley leaned out and slammed the door. The car started with a roar. Leo was eager to make up for lost time.

It was only a short run to the Lotos Club which was upon the crest of a hill in one of the best residential sections overlooking St. Paul. The streets were deep with snow, rutted and packed. Leo drove fast, passing first one car then another with a screech of his horn and a high, nervous cackle.

“What are you doing for a living?” asked Ronny conversationally, jouncing up and down on Peter’s instep.

Peter grunted into the heavy padded top of the car. By squinting he could just make out

Ronny, sitting with his shoulders slumped, his black hair gleaming.

“Advertising?” questioned Ronny. “Quite a grind, isn’t it?”

“Still waiting for that yacht, Ronny?” Leo called back.

Ronny took a square bottle from his overcoat pocket, drank, put it back again — in offended silence.

The car careened around a corner and began mounting a hill. Leo passed two more cars which were laboring up the hill through the deep snow. Ronny paused with a

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 138

cigarette half-way to his mouth and offered one to Peter.

“No?” said Ronny politely.

Ronny lit a match and blew the smoke out. Curls of it came and clung to the padded top next to Peter’s nose.

“Well, I haven’t been up here to the old club since the New Year’s party last week,” Ronny mused, nonchalant, depositing his first ash with care on the floor.

Leo in the front seat snorted loudly. Ronny was inclined to fancy himself as a young man about town and Leo couldn’t stand that.

The car turned a corner, passed through a brief dazzling area of light and skidded to a stop.

"All out, fellows!" called Leo cheerily. "You, too, Ronny."

Ronny stepped gingerly over Peter's feet and got out. Then Peter twisted his way out backwards, shoving and pushing. He straightened up outside the car, panting for breath.

"For God's sake don't eat too much," said Leo, "or you may have to walk home!"

Blowing and feeling a little dizzy, Peter leaned his elbows on the top of the car, rested his chin on one hand, and looked over the car at the club-house, while down below him Leo rummaged under a seat for his bottle.

The club-house was a large rambling structure of wood, painted white. It showed startling white even in the dark night against the black sky. It was brilliantly lighted inside and the light streamed out through many windows upon the white snow and was reflected by the snow in turn up against the chalky white walls. Peter had been inside the club-house two or three times before. It sat just on the edge of a steep hill. In front of it terraced lawns descended to a group of tennis

courts. Below that were a few small houses upon a kind of little plateau ending in a precipice

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 139

which dropped sheer to the level of the city below. There was a wonderful view from the club-house windows of the city with all its lights and the lighted avenues and streets spread out below.

Charley came around the car and stood in the deep snow at Peter's side while Leo was looking for his bottle. Ronny had already started toward the club-house.

"Some night," Charley said.

There were stars in the black sky, but no moon. The stars were like the snow sparkles, like millions of separate, tiny crystals touched by light. It was icy cold with a cold which made Peter think of droshkies and bells and St. Petersburg aloof and white as in novels he had read. The wind blew against his face with a hard numbing cold and his forehead ached, his skin felt taut and dry, his whole body taut. But his mind was clear like a great crystal decanter, hard and bright, out of which he could pour whatever he wanted and in whatever amounts.

“Yes, sir, it is some night!” he said authoritatively, looking down at Charley who, sheltered by the car, could not even be feeling the wind.

Now Leo came around the end of the car, fussing frostily, holding his bottle by the neck as if it were a chicken and he meant to behead it.

They walked up the winding driveway toward the club-house. As they neared the door they looked around once. Peter could see his shadow, a grayish blur, lost back in the bushes by the entrance gate. Leo was counting the parked cars.

“One, two, three.... Well, we started last. But there’s only three cars here ahead of us!”

“Not so bad,” said Charley.

“Not so bad for that old bus of mine,” said Leo. They walked up the steps and in the door.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 140

Ronny was downstairs in the washroom, combing his hair as the three of them entered it. Several other boys were there, too, washing their hands, looking at themselves in the mirrors, a little self-conscious, not yet used to this club-house which was so much larger and grander than their fraternity house. The

washroom attendant, a little swarthy Italian in a white coat was seated on a stool in one corner, cleaning his finger nails, looking bored and rather disapproving.

“Well, how about a towel!” snapped Ronny, with the air of one used to the Lotos Club and to Lotos Club wops.

The attendant got up slowly, still digging under one finger nail; but then he saw Peter, standing at the urinal, and his boredom vanished. His eyes traveled up, traveled down, then up again, widening, beaming, until they fixed at last on Peter’s head, bent over beneath the smooth white ceiling. Peter felt a vague irritation. Such things had begun to get on his nerves. That was the truth.

“Well, that’s that,” said Charley. “Let’s have a drink.”

“Sure, start the party,” said Leo.

And the other boys who had been hanging around the washroom, not quite knowing what to do, and Ronny who had at last finished his toilette, followed Charley and Leo and Peter out into the hall, then upstairs through another hall into a lounge. This lounge was wide and long and high-ceiled, filled with wicker chairs and stand;ng lamps and with one whole wall of windows looking

out upon the city with its twinkling lights below.

“Some swell layout!” cackled Leo, as they paused in a group on the threshold.

But in the whole wide room there was no one and Leo’s voice echoed dismally. Even he was abashed. This lounge was so very little loungy — so spacious and cold-looking with its polished floors agleam between deep rugs, the chairs and

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 141

settees and standing lamps arranged into many separate little groups as if snobbishly.

“Looks like there’s room for us,” said Charley. Nothing ever bothered Charley — except love perhaps.

They all filed solemnly in. Charley found a comfortable chair and flounced, pot-bellied, into it. Every one followed suit except Ronny who went casually over to the window and leaned against it, posing as the young clubman, cigarette in hand, looking out at the city.

Presently the ice broke. More men were arriving every minute, and as they all began to drink, the strangeness vanished. The big room with all its chairs and lights warmed into a series of cozy corners.

Soon the little group around Charley was laughing and talking. They drank from bottles or flasks because no one thought of asking for glasses, though the club was to be wide open for them tonight.

Peter had one whole settee to himself and could stretch his legs as far as he wanted to. Still the circle around Charley and Leo included him, making a large ellipse to do so.

He felt warm and comfortable as he smiled and listened to the talk. Deep within him the whisky was working. It breathed into the wide, dark, damp spaces. And his whole body was coming alive — not only inside — but as if every hair that grew on him bristled and stood erect.

“I’m a giant and I’m proud of it,” he thought.

He began to join in the conversation, laughing and vigorously using his hands. By merely leaning forward in his settee he placed himself automatically in the very center of the group. He would make a remark, which he would have planned carefully beforehand, and then sit back, grinning — like a coast gun, speaking and retiring. Everything he said they laughed at. And people standing around

nearby would laugh, though they could not have heard what he said.

There must have been close to a hundred men in the lounge by this time. Even the older men — and there were one or two bent, white-haired grandfathers, objects of veneration, scheduled for speeches — were feeling a little like college boys tonight, clapping each other on the back and freely offering drinks. Big boxes of cigars and cigarettes stood open on many tables; any one could help himself.

Soon even this big room had become filled with smoke, blue swirls against yellow-gray, merging and emerging. And there was a continuous confused hubbub of voices, laughter rising and falling, the clank of bottles, creak of patent leather, smack of fleshy palm against palm, and — individual and distinct — the small rasping sound made by safety matches sharply struck.

Leo's cackle had become continuous. Charley smiled and smiled, his head on one side, holding a big flask in his hand, a cigarette dangling from his lips and it moving up and down as he talked, as he cracked jokes, one after another quietly, while the others laughed.

Peter had become silent now, scarcely daring to move. He tingled all over with a rare sensuous pleasure. Now he wished that this would go on forever, that it could be like this forever — the warm, smoky atmosphere, the bright lights shaded, and the friendly talk, the feeling of friends about him, warm, close, accepting.

Leo was standing up, a little unsteady on his feet, pulling down his tight-fitting dinner coat. He stood beside his chair, clearing his throat, looking with his blue eyes devoutly toward the ceiling.

“Ooooooh,” he hummed, striking several different notes until he thought he had found the right one. Then in a surprising, clear, resonant voice, he began to sing:

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 143

“Oh, the brothers of ...”

Immediately several boys joined in. Charley waved his flask, smiling, and got, pot-bellied, to his feet. Then all around men began standing up — even those who couldn’t for the life of them remember the words of the song — but bellowing to the tune. And the Freshmen sang, their eyes shining, every word

clear in their minds, only recently drummed in with paddles.

The room was filled with the song which rose and swelled, then sank, then rose again.

Peter stood upright, not singing himself but looking all around upon them, down upon the whole roomful of them, the little men standing arm in arm or in small groups, their mouths wide open, their eyes inclined upward. And Leo with his falsetto trills — an inspiration to behold — his feet wide apart, his chest thrown out like a robin's, his blue eyes intent, his voice striking every note just an instant before the rest of them, leading them on. Then crash! as they followed him, the small bright voice, and soaring upward, crash and crash, until the room seemed lifted, afloat in the roar.

Then the song ended and there was the room again, warm and bright, and cheers and handclaps and matches striking and Leo, standing flushed and bright-eyed, quite swollen with pride, his vest parting company with his trousers. He smiled and looked around him and was clearing his throat for a second song when dinner was announced.

Promptly all the brothers began to file out of the room. Leo struck several notes in vain

as if he would call them back but the procession continued. Leo shook his head regretfully and Charley laughed.

“Never mind, old boy, plenty of time for singing afterward.”

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 144

But Peter was not so sure. He looked about the big room and saw it now rapidly growing cold again, only a few ash-trays smoking, the chairs pulled out of place, looking emptier than ever. He reached down his hand awkwardly and rested it a moment on Leo's shoulder.

“I wish it could have lasted forever,” he said.

Leo looked up at him as if puzzled, then moved away.

“Got to eat.”

Charley and Leo and Peter were the last to leave the lounge. They went across the hall through a wide, high doorway into the ornate dining room with its crystal chandeliers and red velvet hangings. There was one long table decorated with white carnations and green fern leaves which occupied a whole end of the room. A number of smaller round tables were ranged along each side of the room but there was a big, clear space in the center where the

Freshmen were to put on their usual annual show later in the evening.

A special table had been fixed up for Peter at one end of the long table. Its four legs rested on four boxes, just visible beneath the tablecloth. A settee had been dragged alongside for him to sit on. Every one laughed and cheered as he walked across the bare space and sat down sidewise as near the table as he could get. Charley followed him, smiling, and stood on tiptoe beside the table, his chin just reaching its edge, pretending that he was going to eat from it, too. Finally both Charley and Leo took seats at the end of the long table, one on each side, close enough to Peter's table so that they could all talk together.

"Say, this is mighty nice of them to fix this up," said Peter, flushed and grateful.

The table was just about the right height. He put his quart bottle on it and leaned back in his settee.

"Comfortable as can be."

"Well, that was my idea," said Leo. "I talked it over with the committee. Only I wanted them to put two tables on end and another

one across them. Only I guess there weren't enough tables."

"Well, much obliged," said Peter, filling a tumbler on the table with whisky. "Here's looking at you!"

He gulped the whole glassful straight, while Leo watched amazed. Leo's own capacity was so small that he was always amazed by such feats.

"Hogshead is right," he gasped.

"But say," said Charley, "why don't they give him a glass his size, too!"

Charley got up from his chair, smiling. Every one at this end of the long table was watching him, convulsed. One old fellow with a white mustache kept throwing back his head like a war horse and slapping himself on the thigh. Charley took one of the big water pitchers from a serving table. Holding it in both arms with elaborate care, he went over to a potted palm which stood in a corner and poured out the water. The water spilled and overflowed muddy onto the floor.

"Now," he said, bringing the pitcher back, the ice in it clanking, "here's a glass that's just about right."

He reached up to put it on Peter's table, while every one roared with laughter. Then he

seized Peter's whisky bottle and poured the whole of it in, but it would not fill the pitcher. A tall, pale-faced Freshman at one of the round tables suddenly swayed to his feet, wobbled over with his own bottle, and emptied it, half full of gin in with Peter's whisky. Then he went back and collapsed in his chair, shaken with laughter. And Charley with a bow sat down, too.

Peter felt that it was up to him, now. He rose, holding the pitcher in one hand, and waved it at them. He felt

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 146

flushed and confused but was chuckling to himself. They were such good fellows together and nothing they did had any malice in it. All the dark months behind him meant nothing. He had been wrong to be so depressed by what had happened in business and at home. He had been wrong to be bitter. Probably it was his own fault — going around half alive, letting people ride over him. People as a whole were all right. People were fine. Everything here was warm and friendly.

"I drink," he said, and he felt tears in his eyes, "I — drink to the best bunch of fellows in the world!"

He threw back his head, tilting the pitcher high. The first taste of the whisky and gin mixed was nauseating but he drank on without even pausing for breath. The ice slid, nudging his upper lip as he drank, and little trickles ran down his chin, dribbling onto his collar. Every one was watching him. He drank half the pitcher. Then he choked and had to stop. His eyes were red and filled with tears and for a minute he thought he was going to lose what he had just drunk. His chest heaved.

“Say, now, go easy, Pete!” Charley warned him, half rising from his chair, sobered.

But Peter waved him aside almost angrily. Did Charley want him to give up halfway? It was Charley himself who had started it. He lifted the pitcher to his lips again. This time he emptied it. There was only ice which clanked and slid as he banged the pitcher down hard on the table. He wanted to say something more but couldn’t catch his breath.

He sat down, his head bowed, breathing heavily while they all cheered and whistled and stamped on the floor. But some of the older brothers looked vaguely disapproving and the committee in charge looked worried.

Leo reached over and patted him on the leg.

“Good for you, old man,” he said. “You showed ‘em!”

But Charley asked anxiously:

“How do you feel, Pete old boy?”

Peter sat up and with an effort smiled through his tears.

“Fine!” he gasped. He smiled at Leo. “What did I tell you about the hogshead?”

Leo cackled and Charley looked relieved. What was the matter with Charley anyway? Hadn’t Charley started the whole thing himself?

Peter was surprised to find that they were already at the meat course. He tried to eat some but the tiny knife and fork escaped his fingers, slipped between them, and twisted around awkwardly. He did not feel hungry anyway. Inside him the pleasant glow he had experienced earlier in the evening seemed changed into a conflagration. The fiery liquor steamed, coursing through him, and fiery vapors rose, mounting into his brain.

“By God!” he heard himself say in a thick voice, “why don’t they give me a fork my size?”

Out of the corner of his eye, slyly, he observed Charley looking up at him, his glass

halfway to his mouth, a curious worried expression on his round face.

“By God!” he said again.

He seized his fork suddenly and threw it down on the floor like an angry child. He was conscious that he was acting like an angry child and he began to pout into the bargain, all the time watching the fork slide along the shiny hardwood floor. The fork slid slowly, slowly. At last it came to rest near one of the round tables on the other side of the room. He kept his eyes on it, lying there — a little toothpick of a thing on the distant shiny floor — ‘Until a waiter picked it up.

“Say, *are* you feeling all right?” Leo was asking.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 148

Peter turned on him abruptly.

“Why, sure!” He laughed loudly. “What the hell! A little drink like that!”

His face was working but he tried to keep a smile on it so as not to scare Leo.

“I’ll show you!” he said.

He reached over and grabbed Leo’s glass. It was half full of whisky.

“Oh, say now,” Leo protested but he sat absolutely still in his chair.

Peter tossed off the glass in one gulp and thumped it down on his own table. He was irritated to see it turn slowly over on its side, so slowly, as if the glass were a person and were turning slowly over in bed.

And now looking down at the table from above he saw it suddenly as an object — an entity separate and absurd — the little square flat top, covered with a white cloth, the tiny dishes and cups with some infinitesimal markings on them by way of ornament, and a spoon that should have been for salt, it was so small, even two faint green sprigs of fern — good God! like a table set for a doll.

“What the hell!” he thought to himself, “It’s a doll’s house!”

And what was he doing in a doll’s house? Of course he knew. But good God, with considerable cunning he feigned his surprise. His surprised eyes wandered to the side down the long table below him — a long strip of white with little heads and shoulders bent to it on either side, like a long pattern of little heads and shoulders all the same size cut out and tacked to the white table cloth. Why, this was no place for him!

A waiter reached up and set a dish of ice cream in front of him, a limp pink dab, then

scuttled away. They *were*

God-damned funny — runts! Charley was trying to attract his attention — a funny runt, too, pot-bellied, — frog-eyed.

“It’s a swell night, isn’t it, Pete?” Charley said.

Peter stared. How could Charley be so stupid?

“Why, you God-damned little fool,” he said slowly, “do you think I’m drunk?”

He leaned far over suddenly and banged his hand on the table in front of Charley, causing dishes to rattle and heads to turn his way all down that long white strip. This infuriated him.

“Can’t you see!” he fairly shrieked. “Have you forgotten what you said this evening!”

Let the frog eyes bulge! And Ronny, two seats beyond, looked definitely as if he were about to decamp. Damn it, couldn’t any of them understand that he was a giant — a giant in a doll’s house where even the waiters were more at home than he. What did Charley want him to do — sit back and twiddle his thumbs to show how proud he was to be a giant?

He would sit back. He would sit back, sullen, gazing straight ahead of him. Perhaps Charley would be sorry, realizing how hard it was for him. But how easy it was for the runts, everything easy for all of them, Charley included, and Leo. Leo, now, was a mover's son. He fitted into the moving business. He'd simply step into his father's shoes — and there he was!

Peter couldn't help groaning when he thought of his own father's shoes, high shoes, a little wrinkled, the square toes turned up. Why, God damn it! He couldn't even get his hands into them!

He clenched his hands, sitting there, sullen. Except for that one groan, he had been silent a long time. He would have liked to steal a look at Charley. He felt proud to be sitting so silent with such a volcano seething inside him.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 150

If Charley and Leo and the others suspected what a volcano he had inside — deep inside him — they'd forget all their easy-going assurance, their easy places in the world. They'd drop everything and run for their lives.

He began to smile, thinking of them all running for their lives, but then he stopped

smiling. Good God! it was no laughing matter. He couldn't sit on a volcano forever holding it down. If they were going to run, they'd better run now. The fire must soon dart from his eyes, his head become wreathed in smoke. They would see how terrible he was — mighty and terrible.

He sat bolt upright and shook his head violently back and forth and from side to side. Then deliberately he looked all about him, down at all the faces turned toward his, the pale, pinched features. First one, then another. Well, that was right. They were all looking at him. This whole end of the dining room was tense and still.

He pushed his settee back with a grating noise. Then slowly, with infinite care — as if he were going to perform a trick — he brought his arms up from his lap and stretched them out from his shoulders, out and out, a tremendous breadth. On the one side of him his hand touched the wall, but he cast a sidewise glance at his other hand and saw it swinging ponderous above the head of a little fat alumnus three places beyond Leo. For a joke he touched the fellow's head — just lightly, just ruffling the yellow hair — as he brought his arm back. And yet the fellow

changed color, looking down at his plate and fidgeting with his napkin.

Peter laughed. He threw back his head and laughed, but immediately he rested his hands on his knees once more and gazed straight ahead of him, scowling. How completely he had terrified these little men! Perhaps they

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 151

weren't so sure of themselves, now. Perhaps they were beginning to feel that they themselves didn't quite fit in.

There was a group of waiters standing in the dining room doorway in line with his gaze. They stood huddled together, looking at him. They made him think of the little wop in the washroom; so insolent. Now he brought his eyes to bear directly upon them. He felt that as he scowled at them, they must surely shrivel up. They must turn and run. No one could face him. No one could stand up to him.

Still they stood, the fools, and returned his gaze. Frightened, but they did not run — they traded gaze for gaze with a giant.

He felt that he was becoming furious. He could feel a slow fury shake him. It rose from his innermost depths like a living thing, coil on coil, running in twisting convulsive

tremors down his limbs. He could hear Leo's voice pleading, "Pete, Pete!" And Charley's eyes upon him, all the eyes upon him.

Suddenly the strain became too much. Not even himself could hold himself now. He opened his mouth and bellowed — straight at that little knot of waiters:

"Run! you God-damned fools! Run!"

But as he shouted the warning, he swayed to his feet, crouched and picked up the table, lifting it from its four pedestal boxes high into the air. The one hand that held it shot back and back. The table was like a white ghost, flying through the air — high above all their heads — with dishes spilling from it, the pitcher and the spoon. It crashed upon the smooth waxed floor at the very feet of the waiters where they had that instant been standing. It crumpled in a white, splintered mass as they fled.

He could hear the waiters shouting and all about him a tumult — men starting out of chairs, knocking chairs

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 152

over, and down below him somewhere but very close, Leo pleading:

"For Christ's sake, Pete!"

He felt that his legs brushed several clutching arms aside as he lunged forward. He rushed into the very center of the room and stood there facing them.

"I'm a giant! I'm a giant! I'm a giant!" he screamed, pounding his chest.

They were all standing up, moving around, napkins in their hands, swarming' confusedly like a colony of black ants bearing specks of white.

"Look at me!" he screamed, his arms raised above his head.

In his rush one of his fists had struck a chandelier. The blood streamed down, dripped upon his hair, ran in a little trickle down his white shirt front.

"We've got to stop him, fellows. God knows what he'll do!"

Oh, the little troop of husky men, football players, athletes! How slowly they came toward him with mincing steps — a tiny fan of men in black creeping upon him across the smooth, waxed floor. He thrust his head forward at them and screamed:

"I'm a giant and I'm proud of it!"

One man with a determined red face leaped for his swinging arm, and caught it, but was flung aside, falling on the floor. Now they all

rushed in. Peter spread his legs wide, leaned over, and clubbed down at them with his fists as they came, catching them on head and shoulders, bowling them over. They scrambled before him on the smooth, waxed floor. One man seized his left leg and clung, eyes shut, arms clamped. Another man had jumped from behind and landed on the middle of his back, holding on with both arms and legs like an ape.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 153

He turned and twisted to rid himself of these two burdens, but all the time there were more coming at him. Once he had a scrawny neck in each hand and he brought the two heads together — crack! — but those two little heads were hard. Both men jumped again, bloody now, flying at him. Like bulldogs they clung to his legs, his arms, small and furious, refusing to be daunted.

At last the sheer weight upon him was too much. It pressed him down slowly, bending him at the waist. The downward pull at his arms and the weight upon his back were too much. And others were pushing at his legs. But he bent slowly, slowly. He seemed to creak, groaning and swaying with the weight upon

him. Then some one jumped and landed square on his head. He went down flat.

He lay on his stomach, gasping for breath. And now the little men swarmed over him, resentful, savage. He felt their savagery, how they beat him with small sharp fists, kicked him with feet which bored into his sides.

He shook them off once and rose to his knees. He felt that he must cry out, tell them how terrible it all was and that it should stop; and he felt that he must smile. But three of them together threw themselves on him. And this time he was down for good, flat on his back and a dozen men on him holding him down, though he lay absolutely still.

One man sat crying, nursing his head, saying:

“The son of a bitch! The son of a bitch!”

And another man suddenly seemed to go berserk, began to kick Peter in the head. Some one hauled him off. Now as Peter lay, beaten and powerless, with his victors perched upon him, uncertain what to do, another force in him took up the struggle. His great frame shook once more — and these were convulsions not even a dozen men could still!

A stream gushed from his open mouth, spraying them, and they sprang away, drenched and swearing.

His body rolled limply over on its side. He lay there stretched out, gigantic on the floor, breathing heavily, the yellow vomit dribbling from his fine open mouth, until he was lying in a pool on the smooth waxed floor.

V

Her husband had said he didn't think so. He had said there wasn't anything queer about the way it talked. He had said it always said "Hello!" or "Good evening!" coming into the cigar store — just like a man. And it always smoked the same brands — just like a man. Her husband had said there wasn't anything queer about it. But she'd heard tell more than once that they were all a little cracked. She thought this one must be cracked, too.

PETER WAS walking swiftly south along Marquette Avenue when suddenly he saw Leo just ahead of him on the sidewalk. Leo was standing in front of one of Donaldson's show windows looking in.

Peter slowed up as he drew abreast the window. Leo seemed to be gazing with extraordinary intentness at the display, which consisted of three pyramids of boxes of Pillman's new pancake flour.

After hesitating a minute Peter came to a stop just behind Leo. Still Leo did not turn around; but it seemed to Peter that he hunched his shoulders slightly. Peter could see his neck above the hunch of his shoulders, rather thin and pipe — like, with the little round mark on it where he had had a boil.

"Hello, Leo," said Peter, but in a low voice, tentative.

Leo did not move. He continued to gaze with the same absorption at the three pyramids of boxes of Pillman's Pancake Flour. Peter could see in the glass of the window the reflection of Leo's face, very intent and the eyebrows drawn slightly together; closely encircling Leo's face, but in the background,

was a ring of other faces of the people who had gathered around Peter and were pressing closer; high above all these faces was Peter's own, twice as big as any of them, and as if vague, with highlights blurring it slightly — but out of the vagueness, out of the blur, a scowl, hesitant, beginning to form.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 158

2

Peter was seated on his roll of blankets in his bedroom in the fraternity house. He was alone but drinking. He had a bottle of whisky in his hand, half-empty; he had three more bottles in a drawer in the bureau.

He was surprised when some one knocked on the door.

"Come in:" he called.

It was Charley. He said, "Hello, Charley," very guardedly.

"Hello, Pete," said Charley.

Charley seemed ill at ease. He sat down in the only chair in the room and fixed his protruding eyes on Peter. Peter went on drinking. Charley followed every movement of the bottle to his lips. Charley could be very

moral on occasions, and on these occasions he often said the smell of whisky sickened him.

“What are you drinking that stuff for?” he burst out at last.

Peter merely raised his eyebrows and went on drinking.

Charley got up, walked over to the window and opened it. He stood, looking very moral indeed and rather paunchy, breathing in the cold, fresh air.

“Well, you’ve certainly been ruining yourself with the fellows recently.”

Peter said nothing.

“I feel sort of responsible.”

Still Peter said nothing.

“I sort of feel I started it.”

Suddenly Peter began to laugh. Charley looked intensely pained.

“What’s so funny?”

“Oh — nothing.”

“I’ll say there isn’t!” said Charley. He frowned at the

whisky bottle. “See here, Pete. As a friend, I feel there are some things I ought to tell you. You’re just going to queer yourself with every one if you keep on this way. I happen to know

that the fellows in the fraternity are about fed up. In fact they are fed up. I happen to know that at the next meeting they're going to pass a resolution and ask you to move out of the house. Now as a friend I wanted to tell you so that you could move out first and save yourself that embarrassment anyway."

Charley paused. But Peter said nothing. After waiting a minute for him to speak, Charley went on in the same severe voice like a minister:

"Now, if you'll take my advice, Pete, you'll look on this action of theirs as a friendly warning. God knows they don't want to be unfriendly. But they just can't understand. One of the fellows came to me the other day and said: 'Why, I just can't understand it. Old Pete that's always been so good-humored and always took his kidding with a smile—'"

"Why you can tell them all for me to go to hell!"

Charley looked almost as shocked at this as if he had really been a minister.

"Now, Pete, that attitude isn't going to get you any place. The fellows are perfectly in the right. Why, Jesus, nobody has any cause to act the way you—"

Somehow this made Peter angrier than anything else.

“No cause!” he yelled. “No cause, you God-damned little runt!”

On the instant Charley too fired up. He clenched his small fists and his eyes bulged.

“Nobody can call me—”

“Oh, go sit down,” Peter told him roughly. “You’re talking to a giant now, you know. Sure I’m a giant. I write

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 160

ads on women’s face lotion and non-skid toilet paper in the daytime but at night and on Sundays—“

He took another drink from his bottle and began to laugh. He had realized that he still felt a strong affection for Charley. He still liked him very much.

“I’m a giant and I’m proud of it,” he laughed.

“Oh, a God-damned fool,” muttered Charley.

And Charley fidgeted. He started several times to speak, but Peter’s laughter resounding in the small room was much too noisy to allow of his being heard. At last he managed to say:

“You know damned well I didn’t mean anything like this when we talked about being a giant.”

“No?”

“No! My idea was perfectly reasonable and it would have worked too. But if you think you’re going to get any place this way in business or in anything else—”

Peter became serious by degrees. First he began to frown; then to scowl at Charley.

“Now let me tell you a few things for a change. You’ve told me plenty. Let me tell you a few things, little fellow. I know you thought that was a good idea of yours the other night — ‘I’m a giant and I’m proud of it.’ And it was a good idea. Sure, it’s swell. Only you didn’t see the half of it. Why, you God-damned little fool, I’m proud of being a giant in a way you never meant. And I’m prouder of it since what’s happened. You can tell the fellows I wouldn’t stay another day in this house if I could. And that goes for business, too. By God, I wouldn’t be a runt now if I could be. I wouldn’t want to fit into this little runt’s world. And if I could change this world, I’d change it over to fit myself. It needs changing a lot more than I do.” He leered at Charley. “Maybe you think I’m conceited.”

“Well,” began Charley very soberly, “we’ve all got to face things the way they are—”

“The way things are is lousy,” said Peter quickly. “The way things are is stinking. There isn’t anything that’s good or fair. There isn’t any rightness about things. People are sons of bitches. People are bastards.”

“Oh, for Christ’s sake,” said Charley in disgust.

But Peter paid no attention. He went on in a low voice, not really talking to Charley now, looking inside himself:

“If people could only be forced to grow. Maybe they wouldn’t be any better big. I don’t know. I don’t know. But they couldn’t be any worse.”

He sat for a long time silent while Charley stared at him. Inside his mind things he had never really thought of before but which had always been there, large and shadowy — larger, less shadowy in the last few days — were beginning to take shape, to rise up in him. Suddenly he brought both his hands slap together with a noise which made Charley start and frown.

“Do you know what I saw in the paper a while ago—that the height of students at the University here has increased four inches in the past twenty years. That’s the average.”

He paused, oratorical. Charley said nothing.

“And out in California people are getting bigger and bigger. People are bigger everywhere than they were a hundred years ago.”

Still Charley said nothing.

“By God, it’s the most promising thing for the human race I’ve ever heard. There’s nothing worse than smallness. Can you deny that? Small means petty, piddling, doesn’t it? As people grow larger physically they grow larger mentally, don’t they? Their ideas spread out. Maybe they aren’t so God-damned glib. Maybe they aren’t so successful.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 162

But they — they’ve got enough in them to think originally at least — to stand on their own feet with their heads out of the crush, by God!”

“Oh, well now wait a minute, Pete,” said Charley, interested in spite of himself. “Napoleon— ” Peter did not even let him finish.

“Oh, yes, all your small men and what have they done? All your little piddling leaders. My God, what a mess they have made of things. Are you proud of the world as it is today? The world would be better off if Goliath had killed David — yes if all those old giants had killed all the little men. For by God those old giants must have been fine. We only hear the little men’s stories of them. And the little men are cowards — afraid of anything big. The little men are liars — they’re — I tell you it’s terrible to think of the little men hunting those old giants down. Little men. Little men with little ideas. By God, they’re lousy. They swarm all over everything. Why, I can’t go out for a walk without them swarming over me. And they’re all the same. You can’t tell one from another of them. You watch a parade of them. I’ll defy you to tell the difference. Every one the same. By God, it’s little men have spoiled the world. Swarming all over it. Millions all alike and swarming. Can’t you think how fine the world was once — so — so green and fresh — I — I mean.”

But he stuttered more and more, going away from these ideas which were as yet strange, rather frightening to him. He stumbled to a stop. His face was covered with

perspiration. He took out his handkerchief but then sat holding it open in his hand.

He became conscious of Charley standing staring at him. Somehow just then Charley embarrassed him. He wished that he were alone. But he forced himself to raise his head and look at Charley. Charley had his hands in his pockets,

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 163

his arms close against his sides, as if he were cold, but he had his chest stuck out. His chest stuck out almost as far in front as the little pot-belly. All his attitude was disapproving and there was in his protruding eyes, in the lines of his face, an expression at once of distrust and of the most sharp and bitter antagonism.

3

Peter sat up, blinking, white and nauseated. For a minute he could not remember where he was. Then he saw Mrs. Williams and he knew that he was back in his father's house. He must have fallen in a drunken stupor the night before in the Early American downstairs

hall. Now it was morning and there was Mrs. Williams. She did not start nor hesitate. She did not show him in any way that she knew he was there. She walked all that distance around him to the door in the flat, gray light, opened it, and then walked back around him again as if not seeing him. He sat there in the sick slow consciousness of the hall and the gray light, the fresh air through the open door, and the hard floor on which he had been sleeping, the nausea in his stomach, and Mrs. Williams cool and neat in crisp morning dress. As if removed from himself, he had the sharp consciousness of the two of them, of himself on the floor, big, rumped and white of face and with a stinking breath, and of Mrs. Williams circling him on small feet, not looking at him.

4

He was so sick he could hardly keep on his feet. He had been just going to lie down when his father had knocked

on the door of his room. Now here was his father with his eyes red-rimmed, his head just on a level with the top of the Morris chair, talking more fluently than he had ever heard him before.

“I don’t know where it will all end up, my boy, if you’re going to follow this path. Remember your poor Uncle Phelps, your poor dear mother’s brother. It was drink ruined him — a fine strong man! Oh, I just don’t know what to do about this. Clara just washes her hands — and I don’t know. I don’t know what your poor dear mother would have thought. I don’t know.”

There was an ache in Peter’s head, an ache all around his eyes.

“Besides, money doesn’t grow on trees, my boy. If you were out fending for yourself, you’d soon find out that money doesn’t grow on trees—”

“I’ll leave,” said Peter. “I never would have come back if I hadn’t been drunk.”

“No, no, no! Now don’t twist my words that way, boy. Don’t do it. This is your home. Clara and I feel — in fact, you must stay here. Oh, if I only knew what your poor dear mother would have thought about all this. I don’t know. I don’t know.”

Peter held his aching head very high. He looked down at his father over the high bridge of his nose. His father was like a little old woman fidgeting, wringing his hands. How had he ever been afraid of his father?

“—there’s the one hundred and fifty dollars damages to pay Dinwiddie — and maybe that fellow Swenson is going to bring suit.”

Peter started violently.

“What?”

His father looked up at him.

“Don’t you remember? Oh, my boy, what’s gotten into

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 165

you? How could you? Dinwiddie says it’s just chance that you weren’t arrested. They sent for the police. Before they came, you had gone.”

Peter felt his knees very weak. And there was all the time the miserable ache in his head.

“Why, what did I do?” he asked, almost pleading. “What did I do, father?”

But his father did not answer him.

“Oh, if I only knew what your poor dear mother would have thought of all this. But you must stay here, boy. Now you must. In

your room here, that's so nice. And you must be careful. You don't know what you might do. Why you might have killed some one. You might."

Peter's lips were dry, his knees actually shaking.

"What did I do? What did I do? Can't I even get drunk like an ordinary man?"

But then he stiffened, looked his father in the face.

"By God, I don't care. I wish I had killed some one."

His father was not listening. Couldn't his father realize what a torture all this was for him? How came this little, short, strange man to be his father, anyway?

"God damn you," Peter yelled suddenly. "Speak up, can't you?"

But his father was muttering as if to himself:

"Maybe Clara's right. Maybe a visit to France
—"

"Oh, shut up about Clara," yelled Peter.

His father looked up startled, the little old woman.

"What! What!"

"To hell with Clara! And to hell with you! And I'd like to know what right you've got to

talk about my mother. You never even loved my mother. If you had you couldn't have married a bitch like Clara."

"What, sir, what!"

Now his father, too, was angry, the terrible short man.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 166

Now there was no longer anything of the old woman about him.

"You're a monster, sir, a monster!"

And surely there was never such a gulf before, separating father and son. All the enmity of years and years seemed rising between them.

"Your mother might never have died if she hadn't borne you."

"What do you mean?"

His father did not answer.

"What do you mean?" Peter screamed, and he grabbed at his father's arm. But his father struck the hand away, spluttering with rage.

"They had to cut her open. You were a monster and you were killing her. They had to cut her open to get you out."

"Why then, to hell with my mother, too. To hell with her, I say."

Suddenly Peter had seized his father by the coat collar. He had lifted him right off the floor.

"I suppose it was my fault?" he yelled, holding his father up and yelling into his face. "All this is my fault?"

His father was choking and could not answer. Peter took him to the door, opened it, and dropped him outside. Then he closed the door and locked it, and lay down on his bed. For quite a time he could hear his father raging up and down the hall, terrible on his short, bowed legs, terrible and strange.

5

Peter lay in bed, reading. He was still rather pale and weak, but getting along nicely now, getting along nicely. When he had been taken sick so suddenly, it had been impossible to move him out of his room into a hospital. No

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 167

hospital would have had accommodations for him anyway. And he had been so sick, it had been easy to restrain his efforts to leave. Then before the operation, his father had come in

and stood beside his bed and they had shaken hands. That was very pretty.

It was appendicitis he had had. Probably he had gotten it from drinking so much bad liquor. The surgeon who operated on him had carried away his appendix and had shown it around in nearly every hospital in Minneapolis. That was nice, too.

Now Peter lay in bed with the sheets tucked up around him. And he was very pale and weak but he was reading a book about giants. He was reading everything he could put his hands on relating to giants of the past. He had told the nurse that he was going to write a book himself, a treatise on the subject, and that was why he was jotting down names and data. But he had never had any intention of writing anything. He was reading for himself alone.

Perhaps it was a sick-room consciousness of isolation—an exaggerated sense of his aloneness in this Middle Western city — in this purely modern and standardized environment — that had made him so eager to read everything he could about the past, about that misty past when giants walked the earth, when 200-foot, 300-foot giants stood

knee-deep in rich primeval forests and scanned far leagues unspoiled by pigmy men.

He read as a traveler in a foreign land reads about events in his home country. Only what he read was not so clear. There was all that mist of time obscuring what he sought — and a mist, too, formed of the lies of little men.

Still he read eagerly, almost desperately. He read even extravaganzas like Rabelais', like Swift's. More serious books he studied with absorption. He located in the Old Testament the many references to giants. And all the time

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 168

as he read he made notes. Though he certainly had no intention of writing a treatise for pigmies, he jotted down names and data. It was his own background he was trying to create. It was his own pedigree in which he was interested.

For he himself was not of the race of men. He knew that now so surely. He was quite another species — quite a separate being. And the more he read, the more certain he became that he must be most intimately connected with these giants of legend. Of course he doubted their existence no more than he

doubted his own. Rabelais and Swift had been romancing simply; but there were earlier legends upon which many of the extraordinary elements of their tales were based. These earlier ancient legends must be true. By men reputed scientists in ancient times, great bones had been discovered in distant quarters of the earth. When the ground was split apart by quakes, skeletons of giants had been found standing upright in mountains, in dead volcanoes. Travelers noted for their honesty had brought back tales of giant men who pursued their boats through the sea, hurling rock fragments. Reading these things he would feel a tremendous sympathy for the lusty great fellows of the past. He would rejoice when they were victorious. He would tremble with the rage they must have felt at the small treacherous Ulysses men. Lying on his bed, weak and pale, he would scowl at his reflection just visible in the mirror, and he would tear with his fingers at the smooth edges of the sheets.

But then he would pause. He would become suddenly conscious of all the precariousness of his own situation. In this new flat Middle Western city he was absolutely alone, an exile. Even in his father's house — most particularly

perhaps in his father's house — his was an alien presence. And it was not because his father had married again. No place

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 169

where he had ever been had he belonged. Even in his mother's womb he had shown himself different. He had felt some alien giant impulse. So he had begun to swell. Because he would have burst her, they had had to cut her open. They had gashed a great wound in her to liberate him into the world. So, after lingering a few years, she had died. So, he had killed her.

But was that his fault? Was it his fault that he had been born thus out of race, out of time? Evidently his mother had thought so and he could see now that she had never forgiven him. "Oh Harry! Sometimes it — it scares me!" His own mother had dreaded and abhorred him.

His own mother! Perhaps it was wrong even to consider her as his mother, to consider his father his father. Wasn't it much more reasonable that his real parents were in some obscure way those giants of other days? But then why was he here — in Minneapolis? And what was in store for him? He did not know.

He only knew that there was something mighty and terrible in him. Mighty and terrible! In him there was a force; he felt it. In his own belly he could feel it stir, he could feel it bulge. So his mother must have felt with him in her womb.

Surely his mother would not have died for nothing? He himself would not have lived for nothing? When he would look at himself in the mirror — when, lying lax upon the bed, he would look inside himself down the long stretches of his mind — he would feel sure there was something big, some giant's niche that he was meant to fill. If he went on meditating, the thing would come to him. He would see his life like his body, large before him, and stretching away like his mind, into a haze which was the haze of distance.

But it was agonizing not to know now. He felt sometimes as he had used to feel when he was a child and he had gone to the grocery store on an errand for his mother.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 170

There he would be inside the store and several men and women looking at him, and the grocer himself squinting at him, amused but impatient, too. What had he come for? He

did not know. Perhaps he had never known. There, too, the haze. Wasn't there in that haze some one like his mother telling him? But only the dim haze inside him and inside the store and the sharp faces beginning to blur and mock and to grow hostile and the haze spreading. He did not know.

Recently he had had a vivid dream that he was back in his old home. Though he was so big, he had gone back for some reason and he had been surprised to find the home just as before. There was his mother with her white face, seated in the upstairs front room; her sewing in her lap but reading. She called to him — he could plainly hear her voice — and at the same time she tapped upon the window with her thimble, looking out. But he was not outside as she seemed to think. He was already inside the house at the very door. of her room; and though he felt awkward and for some reason did not want her to see how big he had grown, he leaned over obediently and pushed himself through, as best he could, into the room. He was clearing his throat to attract her attention when he became conscious that he was supporting the whole weight of the house on his shoulders. In pushing through the door, he had loosened a beam and the

whole house had settled upon his shoulders, weighting him down. Still she took no notice of him but went on reading, only glancing out through the window impatiently from time to time. At length as he struggled and swayed, with the crushing weight upon him, he heard her murmuring, "Where is that boy? Where can he be?" He tried to cry out: "Here!" but he was too exhausted — he could not say a word. Still she must have heard him, for she looked up suddenly.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 171

She looked straight up at him and smiled her white smile. "Why, Peter," she said; and she smoothed out her lap complacently, commanding him as if he were a little boy, "come sit here."

He had waked in a sweat and thanked God that she was dead and that his old home was a boarding house now, with men in shirt-sleeves, sitting on the front porch. And he had thanked God for his new room — the four walls which sheltered him but asked no questions, the ceiling which covered him, white but impersonal.

Yet he did not belong here. Though his room was so comfortable — with the over-size

mirror, the over-size bed and chair, the over-size meals on the over-size tray, and all his shirts which fitted him, and his three suits — though he was comfortable in his new room as in a cocoon — yet he was an exile. More than an exile, he was like a prisoner. He was in actual danger. Somehow, this new house of his father's typified everything in the world which was hostile to him, which he must overcome or which would certainly destroy him.

Sometimes even late at night he would have a feeling like suffocation in his room where everything around him was so nearly fitted to his needs. He would have a feeling that Mrs. Williams — the others — were walling him in. In spite of his sickness he would feel that he had to get out of the house right away — to go far off from them all. He would turn on his bed. Breathless and suffocating, he would turn and twist between sheets that had suddenly grown hot and confining. All around him he would feel the flat Middle Western city and he would feel the house like an epitome and symbol of the city; and he would feel upon his own shoulders the house like a weight, crushing him as he had been crushed by his first home in the dream.

It was the middle of June.

Peter paced up and down his room, his hands in his pockets. Because the room was so large, he could take four steps from wall to wall — or, if he went past the end of the bed and into the bathroom, he could take six steps in all.

Now he had completely recovered from his illness. As a matter of fact, he had pretty well recovered two months ago. Yet here he was still, cooped up in his room in his father's house, seeing practically no one from one day to the next and doing practically nothing.

He heard some one coming along the hall toward his room. He paused and stood listening. It was Jeanne. She tapped just once as was her custom now. Then he heard her steps going away. After waiting a minute he opened the door and took in his dinner on the tray. There was one whole roast of beef, a big bowl of spinach, two loaves of bread cut in slices, a pie. He sat down in his chair and began to eat, scowling at his reflection in the mirror.

Perhaps it was the movement of his hands — as long from wrist to fingertips as the average man's forearm — above the comparatively small dishes and plates, which gave him such an ogreish look. In two or three sips he would empty a glassful of water; in two or three mouthfuls he would empty a plate. Eating so much alone, he had lost many conventional table manners. Now he thought nothing of picking up a large hunk of meat in his fingers. He did this partly because it was difficult for him to use the small knife and fork, partly because it gratified something in him. He had begun to amuse himself with day dreams and pretenses. Once he had been standing in front of the mirror

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 173

without anything on, scowling at himself, when Jeanne had come into the room. Another time he had been sitting by his window — fully dressed of course on this occasion — when a man walking along the boulevard in front of the house had looked up and seen his big head framed in the window. The man had started and stared before he passed on, as if he, too, had sensed on this Minneapolis boulevard a remnant of the

remote past when giants hid in watch-towers on the look-out for unsuspecting passersby.

Now Peter was ceasing to be satisfied with the past. As he had grown stronger, he had grown more and more restless. It no longer pleased him merely to read in legendary histories of that numerous and lusty company from which he was descended. When he compared his own anomalous position with their past grandeur, he was filled with resentment. He could not bear to think of himself as a left-over, a miserable surviving undersized giant — a mere solitary weak specimen without destination, meaningless. He could not bear to think of himself standing out so alone, stark alone in a solitude absolute like a void, absolute and cold like the moon.

He wanted life around him, life and motion. Of late he had formed the habit of going to the movies nearly every evening. There were two or three neighborhood theaters which had no balconies so that he was able to stand in the back behind the last row of seats. Sometimes, standing thus alone in the dark, watching the bright enlarged figures on the big screen in front of him, he would lose all sense of proportion for minute after minute. That was why even the poorest movies would have such

a powerful effect upon him. Especially if there were no ushers standing near him and the theater itself was very dark and the audience was silent, it would begin to seem to him that the heroic figures upon the screen were identical with himself, that within

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 174

this bright and luminous oblong was a world into which he might step entire. Each time when the performance was over and the lights flashed on in the theater, he would blink surprised. It would be as if everything had shriveled — as if a world of noble proportions had shrunk to pettiness. And he alone remained, but out of place now. There would be a surge of small rat-like people up the aisle toward him and he would stride quickly out, hurrying to find a dark street down which he might walk and be alone, unseen with the thoughts which filled him.

But these thoughts were rarely satisfying. Movies were not satisfying. They were even less satisfying than legendary histories, because they left him with nothing. Even drunkenness was not satisfying. All these things were empty. He wanted to be doing something. And he wanted to be doing

something special. No ordinary activity would ever again be enough for him. He wanted to rush through the world and do a giant's work. He wanted to show himself worthy of the rich past behind him. More than anything else perhaps, he wanted companionship — the companionship of his peers.

As his vitality came more and more back into him, he would feel so full of energy sometimes that it was impossible to stay still. Even in the middle of the night this restlessness would surge in him. He would grab up his hat. Shaking all over and blowing through his mouth, he would blunder out of his room, lunge through the dark, tunnel hall, then down the narrow stairs, past the low living room, out the tiny front door. He would walk for miles over the white sidewalks in the night, and past the toy-like blocks of houses on and on. He would walk for miles, for miles, and still he would not be eased of the fullness that was in him. Perhaps he would pass some lone man on the sidewalk. First he would see the little figure ahead of

him walking along briskly, the legs seeming to twinkle. Then he would come closer and he

would see the back of the head, the matchstick arms. He would gain on the man so rapidly. He would come quickly and noiselessly up. Suddenly from behind, his big shadow would fall over the man, enveloping him. The man would start violently, perhaps cry out, and stand aside and Peter would go past not even looking at him, As he walked away up the street with his long strides proudly, he would feel the man's eyes fixed upon him like two shivers down his back.

Then he would feel sure of himself and sure that there was a great place he was born to fill. He would know that none of the ordinary niches was for him, that somewhere a mighty thing was being prepared for him to do; and he would feel himself ready, impatient for the task. He would tread hard in his impatience on the smooth cement sidewalk, and his footsteps would echo. He would hear the echo rolling among the close small houses. He would be feeling that he must do something great right away, that it could never have been intended that all this force in him should be wasted, even for one moment allowed to dissipate itself, to blow away like excess steam within the silent sleeping city.

Perhaps he had been born to usher in a new era. Perhaps he was like some lone vanguard of an army advancing but yet in the distance. It was an idea which would not yield to ridicule but grew upon him, upon his inactivity and his loneliness. At night, sometimes, he would hear the rumble of their advancing footsteps. He would start up out of bed to find everything changed, the world peopled by men and women of a giant stature. There would be whole groups of them swinging down new wide streets, strutting proud as God through giant cities. And oh, the dewy brightness of that morning. He would yawn and stretch

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 176

and rush out shouting into the new bright day. Standing upon street corners or in spacious green parks or between the colonnades of imposing public buildings, there would be crowds with whom he mingled entirely as an equal. There would even be several men taller than he, though not so strong, angular, elongated specimens, looking indeed a little oversize in the lofty spreading halls, the generous mansions of this brave new world....

There was a knock at the door and Peter started. All the little dishes on the tray on his knees started and clattered. Perhaps it was Jeanne come to take the tray. But no, Jeanne always waited now until he put the tray outside the door.

He sat perfectly still and listened. After a minute the knock was repeated. He lifted the tray from his knees and set it down softly upon the table beside him. Then he stood up; but he did not call out and he made as little noise as possible.

The knocking began a third time. He went on tiptoe to the door, pulled it open. Seth Williams stood on the sill, smiling, looking acid as ever.

“Good evening.”

He walked into the room past Peter.

“Pardon the intrusion. Thought I’d say hello. Just got back from Harvard.”

Peter was completely taken by surprise. Truth to tell he had come to regard his room as a kind of sanctuary and himself as a person not to be treated casually. Perhaps he even enjoyed being to some extent an object of horror to those surrounding him.

Seth Williams seated himself in the Morris chair and instantly looked extraordinarily

small. His legs, dangling, did not even touch the floor.

“Well,” he said, “I understand the Colossus of the West

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 177

has been doing a bit of thundering since I was home last.”

And he smiled; but his eyes behind the spectacles were very sharp and searching and his mouth hung a little open.

“What do you mean?” asked Peter, scowling. He had not moved from his position by the door. He wanted Seth Williams to know at once that he was no longer a person one might smile at.

“Perhaps I should mention,” said Seth, “that I chanced on your friend Charley in Chicago. He had many most interesting things to say about you.”

Peter grunted. By this time his scowl must have been altogether terrifying; but Seth Williams did not seem to be affected by it.

“He expounded certain faint ideas,” said Seth — “mere faint echoes, I have no doubt, which he gave me to understand had originated with you.” Seth paused. “Most interesting.”

Peter said nothing; but his fists clenched. Seth Williams never took his eyes from him and never stopped smiling.

“As a matter of fact, Blenner,” Seth Williams continued, “as a matter of fact, I’m afraid you have him worried. Your ideas, I’m afraid, have been too much for his intellect. The outcome of it all was that he wanted me, as soon as I arrived in Minneapolis, to take your father aside and have a long talk with him.”

“What for?” Peter demanded.

Seth Williams did not immediately answer. He seemed to be enjoying himself thoroughly.

“Well, to put it briefly, Charley thinks you’re insane.”

Peter started violently.

“What!”

“He thinks you ought to be kept under some kind of guard.... It’s always our friends, Blenner, who send us to lunatic asylums.”

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 178

Peter was dumbfounded.

“Why—why—why—”

“I took it on myself,” Seth Williams pursued smoothly, “to look in on you a minute instead. I happen to know how you are regarded just now — below stairs as it were. With only a

very little more pressure you might really end up in an asylum.”

“You’re a liar,” Peter shouted. But he looked at Seth Williams perched on the big chair, his thin legs dangling, and somehow he could not work himself into a proper fury. “A liar,” he repeated lamely.

Seth Williams did not wink an eyelash.

“That’s not very powerful thunder from a giant,” he said. “If you were really insane, you’d do better. But you aren’t. You aren’t any more insane than I am. If you think so you’re just fooling yourself.”

“I don’t think so!”

“No? ... Then we’re agreed about something. As a matter of fact you interest me, Blenner. I think you’re a very interesting case — but you’re much too ordinary ever to be a really remarkable case.”

Peter was muttering. He felt baffled and humiliated. How was it that this little sissified bookworm could sit there and smile at him and talk to him so?

“On the other hand — ” began Seth Williams.

“God damn you,” Peter cried suddenly.

He reached his big hands toward Seth Williams but the hands as if of themselves

described an arc in the air and he ended by fumbling with his tie.

“On the other hand — ” Seth Williams continued, “you shouldn’t take history too enthusiastically, Blenner. Goliath, if he ever existed, was probably about six feet four. Even Homer nods, you know, and it’s rarely on the side of accuracy.”

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 179

And there he sat — somehow the consummate pigmy, the complete, the perfect pigmy and Peter felt as helpless as if he were tied hand and foot.

“Well,” said Seth Williams with a smile.

He rose and walked slowly past Peter to the door. Under Peter’s very arm he walked and Peter did not move.

“A *bientôt*,” said he, turning at the door. “But, Blenner, in the future, just be a little more careful whom you talk to and what you say. No use rushing into asylums, after all!”

He went out. The instant the door closed, Peter ran at it but he stopped with his hand on the knob, embarrassed. Now he was acting like a madman indeed. He wasn’t a madman but a giant. Surely no one could put him in an

asylum for being a giant. He sat down in his chair and began to brood.

7

But how could a giant not go mad?

Two weeks more of brooding. Two weeks of pacing up and down his room, listening for sounds in the alien house, feeling the whole alien city pressing upon him. Now if this wasn't madness what was it? What was it that rose up in him in the middle of the night, shaking him bodily from his room? It was at least something that he could not resist like a great hand upon him, driving him out of his room in the silent sleeping house, driving him through the narrow hall and down the narrow stairs. He felt that he could not breathe. He was clawing with his hands at the walls and the ceiling. Once he would have fallen but the close walls braced him. Something crashed to the floor, and for a minute he had a fear that the whole house was tumbling on him. He reached the small front door and bulged out

through it. He was escaping from the house like a genii from a bottle. And his body seemed to swell, to be tugged upward from the earth as he ran swiftly over sidewalks that were dead white in the moon and past houses that were white, past a man with a startling ghost-white face.

Why should he run if he were not mad? Why should he groan and laugh and sob aloud — leap in the air — grab with his hands at high branches of trees? Then on again running, though there was no one behind. Surely no one would have dared to follow him. Surely no one could if they dared.

Now the houses were thinning out and there were the city dumps, excavations, and many white signboards. There were concrete grain elevators, tall and tubular. Finally there were woods, black separate trees and fields white under the moon. He was running down the middle of a narrow dirt road. He saw red barns in the deep shadows, red black. And houses black. He smelled the odor of farms and heard a steel windmill creaking. Two black horses raced him through a field like two black dogs.

And if he was mad, he was proud of his madness. In such a world! A world where

Charley — his good friend Charley — had wanted him put in a lunatic asylum. And his father — his own father — and Mrs. Williams would have been glad to do it. Only Seth Williams: “You aren’t mad. You’re much too ordinary ever to be mad.” Why had he not killed Seth Williams then? Why had he stood there, motionless, trembling? He, a giant and helpless before a pigmy. Oh, it must be the pigmy way of life he had gotten into. That was why even the scrawniest of them could stand up to him and insult him. He had accustomed himself too long to their little regimen, living in their cramped houses, walking through their narrow streets, half-starving on their pitiful, slender rations.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 181

Maybe that was it and he was starving. It was human flesh he needed like the giants of old to make him fit and strong. A giant’s feast. Human fat and human lean, human bones and heads and hearts. He wondered how it would be in all reality to seize one of these little men and tear him limb from limb, stuff the tidbits into his mouth.

He remembered how his mother had always insisted that he use a finger-bowl, just

wetting the tips of his fingers, one after the other. Oh, but that was long ago now and that was foolish, too. He was no ordinary man. He must be made of mightier stuff. He saw himself bigger and fearless and shaggy, standing on a rock looking out to sea, or crouched in a tower watching for his human prey, wading out into the sea after a boat-load of them, wading back again with two or three alive and kicking in each hand.

“Fee, fi, fo, fum!”

He said it aloud as he ran, leaping and swaying down the narrow dirt road.

“I smell the blood of an Englishmun!”

He could feel himself getting angrier and angrier. The insolence of Seth Williams — of them all.

He swore and lifted his fist high in the air. He stood stock-still in the middle of the road with the white fields in the moonlight stretching out on either side of him. He could not make up his mind whether to go back to his father’s house. Undoubtedly Seth Williams was there, in his little bed, sleeping soundly. He could go softly back, stick his hand in the window and snake out Seth Williams. Seth Williams would be too frightened to cry out. “So I’m not mad, eh?

You won't let me be normal — you won't let me be mad." He would hold the head tight in one hand, give the body a twist with the other. The miserable, scrawny neck would snap. Then how he would tear him, crunch his bones! He would walk along the Minneapolis street hold-

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 182

ing the limp body, plucking what he wanted from it and eating hungrily, spewing out the parts that did not agree with him, spitting them out contemptuously on the smooth antiseptic pavements. And he would use no finger bowl.

In the morning they would find the grisly spatters along the street, chewed gobbets, gristle. He saw the bug-like headlines: HORRID MURDER. Thousands of crisp papers delivered at thousands of little doors, sold at hundreds of little corner newsstands. Minneapolitans would swarm in the city, scrambling out of houses, stores, waving their arms in the air, arguing, rushing up and down the narrow streets, standing in frightened clusters at every corner. To arms! To arms!

He saw himself gigantic, unafraid, making off cross-country, across wheatfields,

pastures, swamps and woods — armies of little men following him, all rushing together in their marching, rubbing shoulders one with the other—tiny identical shoulders.

They would trace him by the trampled fields, the broken-down houses and blood and woe he left behind him. He would make no effort to conceal his progress. He would leave stray grinning farmers torn into pieces, scattered through the leaves and branches of bushy trees, or more intact, hung defiantly on telegraph poles.

So they would corner him at last in a field outside a village. They would think they had cornered him; but that would be his trick to get them all there before him in close crowded ranks. He would wheel upon them as they came rushing at him. With his big cudgel swinging, he would bowl them over. They would wave their tiny arms, moving forward in a mass. But it would not avail them anything. He would cut down whole ranks of them, little men in uniform. Then, when he had vanquished

them, he would build a fire on the ruins of the village and roast them, one by one ...

Standing motionless in the center of the narrow road, he stretched his arms up and out in a tremendous gape. His sharp profile flattened as he bent his head backward and his mouth yawned wide. Yes, he was hungry! It seemed to him that he had been always hungry, with the little men's rations lying hard and cold and meager at the pit of his stomach. Oh, but he was hungry for more than food. In body and soul and mind, starvation was laying waste all his essential being. And he was pinched and pale, gazing upward toward the sky, toward the wide moonlit sky, star-sprinkled ...

After what must have been a long time, he roused himself, hesitated a minute, then went on along the road. He was walking now, for he was tired. Only occasionally he would burst into a run. Sometimes the road would go down into a hollow between tamarack swamps and there would come out at him a cold damp breath and he would hear close crawly sounds in the muck. Or he would hear nothing. There would be absolute silence. Then he would come up out of the hollow and look back and he would see the tamaracks black as pitch but with a kind of whitish mist between and all the tamaracks growing very

close together. For a long time 'there were only these swamps and on higher ground scrub woods, few farms. He did not know what part of the country he was passing through and he had no idea how far he had gone, nor in what direction from Minneapolis. Still he kept on, driving himself now as he had before been driven.

At last, when it seemed to him that for hours he had been walking down the long dirt road between dark marshy woods on either side, and just as the moon was setting, slowly setting, he found himself entering a small

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 184

town, silent as if deserted in the late night. All the houses sat huddled together among bushes and trees, The road he was following had turned into a wider dirt street. He did not pause in his heavy swinging stride. The street led him straight through the center of the town which was not large. It could not have more than five hundred people in it.

There were lofty trees arching over the middle of the street. They gave the town an old and settled air. He passed two white buildings, close to the street, stores evidently, dark, deserted. All the town slept so

peacefully beneath the setting moon. A few dogs barked but he paid no attention.

When he came to the outer edge of the town, he turned almost unconsciously and walked back again, keeping always to the exact middle of the street, From minute to minute he would mutter to himself.

Each time when he came to the outskirts of the town, he turned and retraced his steps, walking back past the same dark huddled houses, the two white store fronts, keeping to the exact middle of the street beneath the lofty arch of the trees. At last even the few dogs ceased their drowsy barks. The village slept, absolutely silent, peaceful in the deep darkness preceding the dawn. The only sounds were of his footsteps, faint heavy thuds in the thick loose dust and of his voice low and muttering.

All the rest of that night he walked back and forth, wearing a giant's path through the sleeping town. Mechanically, his feet, one after the other, lifted into the air, moved forward, planted themselves on the ground. His arms swung ponderous at his sides. His body was like a tower moving jerkily forward, seeming to sway, to be about to fall, first to one side, then the other, but braced

just in time by the descending feet, progressing as by a series of major catastrophes narrowly averted.

His head weighed heavy on his neck. His hands strained downward from the wrists. All the massive structure of his head and shoulders and chest and arms and abdomen pressed upon his moving hips. It was as if the earth were exerting a definite downward pull, as if he had become conscious for the first time of the effort by which his body was held upright. It was an exertion of the will which had raised him above the flat earth. It was a mighty constant effort down his backbone, down all his limbs, which maintained this great structure of his body, kept it intact, a separate entity. Now he felt the strain of living. Now he felt the downward pull of the earth, the flattening influence of its soil.

When dawn came he made his way back, along the white deserted road, between woods that were faintly green now, between swamps that were full of miserable stunted trees, to a creek he remembered passing. The creek sparkled coldly in the pale morning light. It was scarcely more than fifteen feet wide. He

slid down the gravel bank at the side of the road.

Standing at the edge of the creek close to the bridge, in a clean patch of sand, he took off his clothes slowly, looking along the road from time to time to be sure that no one was coming. At last he stood naked beside the bridge. He stepped into the water which was cold and clear. It rippled as it flowed around his ankles and over his large white feet. It was scarcely up to his knees even in the center of the creek; but he lay down in it. He lay with his buttocks on the gravelly bottom, his feet pointing downstream, all the rest of his white large body afloat among the shallow ripples.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 186

He lay absolutely still while the water flowed about him and over his big limbs and over his white chest.

8

He woke with a start, not remembering where he was, There was a dense curtain of leaves above his head. He heard a shout close by and sat up blinking. Scrubby trees grew all

around and there was rubbery underbrush twisted underneath him where he had been lying. As far as he could see on every side there were the trees very close together.

He heard another shout, a little farther off, and every few minutes the shout was repeated, near or far. He turned over on his hands and knees, slowly, for he was stiff. He had a bad taste in his mouth and his head felt dull. He would have liked to lie down again and go to sleep; but something drove him to investigate the shouts. He crept slowly toward them through the underbrush. He had no idea what he would find nor what he was going to do about it; but he had definitely the feeling that he was in the center of a forest, and that he should be stealthy, creeping through the underbrush. So he was surprised when the woods suddenly gave way before him. There was a field and a man was harrowing it, back and forth from one end of the field to the other. The man sat on the harrow, hunched over, looking half asleep; and the horse looked half asleep; but every so often the man would start up and shout, and the horse would start and lustily tug.

Peter waited; then crept closer to the edge of the field until he was screened only by a

large clump of bushes. He sat down on his haunches, watching the man and the horse around the corner of the clump. Once they were so close

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 187

to him, he could have reached them in two strides; and he wondered what would happen if he should rush out suddenly, waving his arms above his head and yelling. The man's face was like a mask, eyes drooping. He was chewing tobacco thoughtfully as the horse chewed its bit.

For a long time Peter squatted there motionless on his haunches, peering out at the man with a kind of breathless curiosity. It was almost as if he had never seen a man before. But at last he backed away through the underbrush. As soon as he was out of sight of the man he stood up. He made his way as best he could through the thick low woods until he found a road.

It was only when he got on the road and stretched himself that he realized to the full how tired he was. Every muscle in his body ached. The sun was already high in the skies and the road burned his sore feet through the soles of his shoes. He noticed that he had on

no hat. Then he felt in his pocket and brought out his wallet. There was ten dollars in his wallet, no more.

After hesitating a minute he went slowly up the road past the little woods, then past the field where the man was harrowing. He kept his eyes fixed on the road; but he heard one of the man's shouts suddenly chopped in half and he guessed that the man had seen him. He went slowly past the end of the field, feeling that both the man and the horse were watching him.

VI

"Well, women have with donkeys, ain't they?"

"No!"

"Why, sure!"

"Well — "

" — and his ears is pretty long!"

"Ears! Hah! Hah!"

"Hah! Hah! Hah!"

THE HAYSTACK was already the size of a two-story building, oblong in shape, about fifty feet long by thirty wide. Its sides rose perpendicular from the ground. It had been most carefully constructed, wagon-load by wagon-load. Yellow, oblong, perfectly symmetrical, it looked like an arbitrary geometric shape, placed with exactitude in the center of a circle which was the horizon, between the two flat planes of earth and sky. It should have been rigid, like the flat yellow earth, the flat blue sky — rigid and unbending like the dark circle of the horizon. In reality it was extraordinarily elastic and soft. Standing upon it, laying the hay, Peter sank knee-deep at every step. When he had to move rapidly, it was like walking on springs. He felt that if he took a good jump into the center, coming down with all his weight, he would bend the whole stack beneath him and be catapulted up, with a hard metallic clatter, against the close flat blue sky.

It was stifling hot. Dry heat welled from the stack and the dry hot choking dust of the hay filled the air. There was a kind of fork on a pulley which brought up the hay; it would

take a big wagon-load in three mouthfuls. Up on top of the stack with Peter, old Hansen showed him what to do and cursed when he did things wrong. With his red face, his pot-belly, the pitchfork in his hand, and stamping up and down through the dry yellow heat-waves of the hay, he looked like a small fat medieval devil, incongruous in the center of the geometric landscape.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 192

“Not there! Not there!” he would scream as the pulley fork swung overhead and Peter steadied it with his hand. “Yeesus! Vell, vhat you vaiting for? Dump it! Dump it!”

Every part of the stack must be laid symmetrical. There was one right place for every successive forkful of hay. The hay must be smoothed out carefully, stamped correctly down. There must be no soft places in old Hansen’s stack, no holes for water to collect in, rotting the hay.

Peter was confused by Hansen’s shouts. Though he had been working for Hansen almost two weeks, this was only his second day’s experience of haying. Everything that Hansen knew by heart was mysterious to him. And Hansen explained nothing but stamped

and shouted. Peter was confused, too, by the presence of the Murphys from across the road, who were helping Hansen with his haying. There were the three Murphy boys and their hired hand, Sundquist, bringing the hay in from the fields; they had two teams with two wagons; there was a constant bustle about the stack, Sundquist's jokes, Hansen's shouts, the slow winks of the three Murphy boys. Though none of them seemed to like Hansen but were constantly making fun of him, they all worked together with him perfectly. The Murphys and Sundquist and Hansen fitted together into a machine. Peter stood apart not knowing half the time what was happening. He got in the way, did things wrong. The first thing this morning, he had broken the handle of his hay fork, lifting up too heavy a load. Hansen had cursed him, giving him another fork. Sundquist had joked: "Watch him! He'll lift the stack on you!" And the three Murphy boys had laughed, spitting tobacco and winking.

For the past twenty minutes Hansen had been shading his eyes from time to time, looking out over the fields toward home. Now he suddenly stopped work, leaned on

his fork, and began to grin. Peter paused, too, and followed Hansen's eyes. The two of them on top of the stack could see far across the flat fields, brazen-yellow in the sun. Anna, Hansen's hired girl, was coming slowly in their direction, a half a mile away. She carried something heavy on her head, something in each hand. Squat and fat and solid, she seemed to make no motion of her own. It was as if the flat field itself moved ponderously forward like a heavy brass plate, bearing her knobby form.

Hansen took off his hat and scratched his bald head which shone in the sun. Paying no attention to Peter beside him, he grinned over the edge of the stack at the two men in the half-empty wagon below: Ed Murphy and Sundquist....

"Vell, boys!" he cried in a special festive voice, "By Yeesus, ve eat!"

"Oh, Yoompin' Yiminy, yes!" mocked Sundquist.

Sundquist was a second generation Swede — American — almost as American as the Murphys themselves — and he never tired of making fun of Hansen's English. Hansen had been in America about as long as Sundquist

had been alive; still there were certain words he could not pronounce.

"Sure a little food won't taste bad," said Ed Murphy, winking' sidewise at Sundquist. "Even Svenska vittles."

"Yoo-hoo, eats!" yelled Hansen, waving his arms in the air to attract the attention of the two other Murphys who were in a nearby field, loading the second wagon. He put his hands to his mouth, producing a yell that was ear-splitting — "Eats!"

Peter was surprised. Generally Hansen mentioned food with nothing but reluctance. At meals in the kitchen he would watch every morsel Anna served them. He would sit at the table, facing the stove so that he might stop all extravagances in the raw. "Full stomach, empty head,

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 194

by Yeesus!" he would say, rubbing his little round belly and grinning.

Perhaps he wanted to show the Murphy boys by his hospitality what a good American he was. He was always saying: "I'm as good American, by Yeesus, as any smart-aleck fellow!" Undoubtedly, too, being shrewd and having a Scandinavian's faith in coöperative

farming, he foresaw his own profit in this arrangement whereby the Murphys helped him with his haying in return for his help with theirs.

After sundry more jokes and winks Ed Murphy and Sundquist finished unloading their wagon and drove it around to the opposite side of the stack to unhitch the horses. Mike Murphy and his brother, Tom, came driving in from the field with the other wagon full of hay and brought it into position at the side of the stack.

“Leave it till after lunch, boys!” Hansen shouted, his face wreathed in smiles.

Hansen scrambled down the ladder from the stack and hurried to help unhitch the horses. Anna was coming steadily nearer. Mike led his team a little way into the field and picketed them, while Tom followed, bearing the nose-bags. On the other side of the stack, Ed had unhitched his team and tied them to the rear of the empty wagon. Sundquist was putting on their nose-bags, whistling, still saying from time to time, “Yoompin’ Yiminy!”

No one paid any attention to Peter, standing alone in the middle of the stack, with the sun beating down upon him. His clothes were makeshift, the same he had worn when he left

home. The loose tweed trousers were torn and dirty; and the fine white shirt was dirty and stank. He wore no hat in spite of the heat; of course there was no place here where he could order such things to his measure. He would not have been able to afford to, anyway.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 195

Old Hansen paid him just thirty dollars a month. "Yeesus," he had said, when hiring him, "vouldn't feeding be enough?" Peter had had to discard his socks, too; and his feet, chafed by the leather, were sore and blistered. Rivers of sweat ran down his chest and between his shoulders. The heat on the stack was insufferable. It beat down from above; welled up from below. In the heat, the smell of the new hay was over-sweet, sickish. It made him feel dizzy. He went slowly toward the ladder which led down from the stack.

Anna was quite close now. Hansen, having helped with the unhitching, was running excitedly to meet her. She moved slowly, calm and imperturbable, her black-stockinged legs wide apart. Though she was as young in years as Peter himself, there was something extraordinarily old about her, the heavy changeless face, her heavy-breathing

mirthless calm. From the first day Peter had arrived, asking for a job, she had been very kind to him, and unamused, looking up at him out of serious blue dumb eyes.

She spoke only a few words of English. She was some distant cousin of Hansen's who had come over from the old country to be his hired girl after his wife's death, a little over a year ago. Being slow to catch on to American ways, she did a great deal of work and got paid next to nothing for it. Before Hansen took on Peter as a hired hand, he had had her working out in the fields like a man. But the neighbors had not approved of this; and anyway there was plenty of work to do around the house and barn and kitchen garden. Eventually Hansen would probably marry her, though she was young enough to be his daughter. He was very jealous of her. He hardly ever allowed her to go out for fear she would get ideas and ask for more money.

Scant shade was cast by the midday sun. In this flat

baking country of stubbly yellow fields there were no trees nearer than Hansen's house a mile away. But there was a narrow strip of

shade like a carpet all along one side of the stack. Peter went and stood in it, panting, close to the stack. Still he stuck up, head and shoulders, out of the shade. Even his feet down below thrust out into the sunlight, breaking the rough-edged pattern of the shade on the stubble.

Ed Murphy and Sundquist came around the end of the stack. Sundquist saw Peter and pretended to start back in terror, at the same time yelling:

“Yoompin’ Yiminy!”

Ed Murphy and Sundquist joined Mike and Tom Murphy; and the four of them stood in a group beside the loaded hay-wagon. Anna had come up by this time, walking always at the same steady pace, with Hansen by her side. She had one big basket on her head and carried a basket in each hand. Hansen kept firing questions at her in Swedish but she paid no attention. She stood looking around, answering merely, “*Ja, Ja*” — keeping her head perfectly steady so that the big basket upon it would not be disturbed.

Finally her eyes fell upon the loaded hay-wagon. After gazing at it for a minute, she went in between its shafts and set down her three baskets between the front wheels. The

hay-wagon, wide and high, with its broad sloping shelves extending out at the sides, really cast quite a bit of shade. It was a good choice. Hansen grinned at the Murphys excitedly.

“Yoost like my front porch,” he said.

Sundquist muttered something and the three Murphys laughed, spitting and winking. Sundquist ran over behind Anna, who was on hands and knees beneath the

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 197

wagon. He brought his palm down smartly on her broad bottom which stuck out between the shafts.

“Yoost like my back porch!” he said.

The three Murphys roared, their quids in their cheeks. Old Hansen flushed angrily, looking at Sundquist, but then he began to laugh with the Murphys. Peter, standing by himself, close to the stack, watched and felt his resentment stirring. Anna had been kind to him; she was solemn like a church. He thought it cruel to make fun of her — though, indeed, she herself didn't seem to mind. She had not even turned around but had continued unpacking her baskets, making a

great clatter with white china plates, tin cups, and covered dishes.

Because Anna was an out-and-out foreigner and could not even understand much English, it was a joke with some of the neighboring men to make very dirty remarks in front of her. Sundquist in particular — who was half-hobo anyway — would walk up to her and make the most insulting remarks in her face. He would lean over her, his pimply face set, his thin wiry body tense; and he would seem to be breathing harder and harder as he made his remarks out of the corner of his mouth. After all she was a young girl. Perhaps some lustier strain of his fathers running through Sundquist made him feel attracted in spite of himself by the un-American breadth of her body, her sturdy hips set wide apart — "You could drive a team through there," said he — her whole wide peasant build. But when he would look straight at her and in his smart nasal American make some remark about stallions or bulls, she would merely say, "*Ja, Ja*" — as if agreeing with him. And that would set every one except Hansen laughing. Sundquist himself would be staring straight at her and breathing hard; but then he would jerk away and turn

toward the others with his long upper lip curled, ready to laugh more uproariously than any one.

Hansen had begun to take the Murphys by the arm, one by one, and shove them into places of honor in the shade underneath the wagon.

“Yoomp in, boys!” he kept saying, “Yoomp in! Eats!”

Sundquist looked toward Peter and formed elaborately with his lips the words, “Yoompin’ Yiminy!” — but Peter did not smile. Sundquist waited until Hansen was about to follow the Murphys under the wagon. Then he dived in front of Hansen and scrambled underneath. Hansen said nothing but elbowed him roughly. Now they were all underneath the wagon in a little tight circle in the shade. Disliking the feeling that they were looking out at him between the wheels, Peter moved away from the stack and stood close beside the wagon so that only his legs were visible to them. He heard Sundquist say:

“Two nice trees you got planted here, Hansen — a leetle far apart though — where’s the third one?”

Even Hansen laughed wholeheartedly at this remark. The laughter rose muffled from underneath the wagon. Peter shifted his tired feet and leaned his elbows in the soft hay piled on top of the wagon. He looked out over the wagon at the fields.

Those underneath had already begun to eat. He could hear them crunching, swallowing, smacking their lips. Now Anna called him and he went to the front of the wagon and stood waiting while she filled a plate for him. There were two big dishes of boiled potatoes, the dishes swathed in towels to keep them warm. The potatoes were in hunks, wet and steaming. There was a platter of meat, cut in slices, blackish, dry and fibrous. A fruit jar full of thick, yellowish gravy. Slices of crumbly white bread, spread with

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 199

bacon grease. A pail of coffee, lukewarm, milk and sugar mixed in with it.

Anna took advantage of the occasion to fill his plate extra-full. She was quite obviously worried about him. In the past weeks he had lost fifty or sixty pounds which made him look rather gaunt in the cheeks. Once at dinner in the kitchen, when Hansen stepped

out for a minute, she had piled his plate with baked beans, making signs to him to eat them up in a hurry. On several occasions, when he was working around the barn and Hansen was out in the fields, she had brought him big slices of bread, soaked in molasses.

Now she handed him up a tin cup of coffee with a sign for him to drink it and have another. He did so; then he took the plate from her, and went and leaned against the side of the wagon once more. But he was not hungry. The sun beat straight down upon him. The two cups of coffee he had had were scarcely two mouthfuls. His throat felt dry and the meat seemed to stick all the way down. The potatoes were slimy and had a faint cottony taste from the towels which had been wrapped around them. There was nothing in the meal to satisfy him in any way. Yet it was a feast, compared to what they usually had. He could hear old Hansen underneath the wagon chuckling with joy and pride:

“Some eats, eh, boys?”

Soon Anna was giving every one second helpings while Hansen directed fussily.

“Eat all you vant, boys! No poison! Yoost the kind of feed ve always have by the Hansen house.”

Anna backed out from under the wagon with the platter of meat in her hand. She came and stood close to Peter, looking up. He held his plate above her head so that she would not be able to see how little he had eaten.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 200

“No more, thanks,” he said gruffly.

But she tapped him on the leg. He looked down and saw that she had turned her back carefully on those underneath the wagon. She was fishing with her hand in between her big young yellow breasts. He looked quickly away. Now she pulled something out, damp and limp, and handed it up to him. It was a bar of Hershey’s chocolate, the five cent size.

Before he could make any protest, she had squatted, bearing the platter of meat, and disappeared underneath the wagon. He was left holding the little bar of chocolate.

“Well, I’ll be God-damned,” he muttered.

Of course her action had touched him. He began to scowl at the bar of chocolate.

He bent suddenly to put his plate on the ground. He wanted to be alone. He could not eat any more anyway. As he stooped over, holding the plate, his head came down below the bottom of the wagon. He found himself

suddenly face to face with those underneath. They all looked up, surprised and startled. He, too, started back involuntarily. There were the six of them curled close together in such a tight cramped space, and his own head peering in at the side, making the space seem smaller than ever. They had just finished eating. Sundquist had been leaning up against Anna, pretending to be asleep; and Hansen had been in the very act of eying him furiously. Ed Murphy, with his mouth full of fresh tobacco juice, was too surprised to eject it. Peter remained motionless for a minute with his head down among them. Then he put the plate on the ground and straightened up. He felt dizzy and curiously resentful. He heard Sundquist blowing out his breath in an exaggerated whistle.

As he walked stiffly away, he felt that they were all staring out from underneath the wagon at him. He rounded

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 201

the corner of the stack and glanced back over his shoulder. Now he could no longer see them. He went around until he was on the opposite side of the stack from them. He paused and looked about him in all directions.

There was no one as far as he could see. It was as if the big stack: had cut him off from humanity. There were only the two horses tied to the rear of Ed Murphy's empty wagon. Beyond that, the flat yellow fields seemed to stretch endlessly. Nowhere even a tree.

The hot noon was breathless. The two horses champed and chewed, steaming in the sun. From his own body the strong sweaty odor rose in waves, as if visibly, like heat waves. He still held the bar of chocolate concealed in his palm. He glanced at the two horses tied to the rear of the wagon; then he stepped to the front of the wagon, crawled between the shafts and wriggled underneath, until all but his legs were in the shade. It was surprisingly dark: after the direct glare of the sun and it seemed to him almost cool and comfortable. He lay for several minutes flat on his belly breathing heavily. Though he could look out' between the wheels at the sunlight all around him, he felt far removed from the whole yellow scene. Even the two horses tied to the wagon, their hooves a few feet from his face, seemed a good distance away. He held the bar of chocolate close up to his eyes. The paper was wet and greasy with perspiration and the chocolate inside perfectly limp. He

rolled the bar, paper and all, into a round pellet between his fingers; then scratched a hole in the ground, dropped the pellet in and covered it with dust. He hammered down the dust with his fist.

He wished to God people would mind their own business. What he wanted more than anything else was to be let alone.

After a minute he rested his head on one arm. Against

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 202

the sweaty skin of his cheek he could feel the hard ridged muscles. He wanted to have nothing to do with any of the pigmies. He wanted to maintain in the face of all the world his independence.

Every day on the farm he was getting stronger. He was standing square on his own feet, growing stronger and stronger. It was a pleasure to him when he was alone, as he was now underneath the hay-wagon, to tense his muscles angrily, to run his left hand across the bunched muscles of his right arm. Often he would be working alone out in a field and he would not mind the sun's rays beating down upon him or the gusty wind blowing full in his face or the rain falling gently all

over his body. He even liked the sweat which came pouring from him at these times, the sweaty odor of his body, the ache and strain of all his muscles. He would be filled up with such a sense of power as no pigmy certainly had ever felt. He would scowl to himself as he labored, alone in the flat fields, feeling himself equal to whatever might come, feeling within himself a kind of fulfillment already ...

Two of the Murphy boys came around the corner of the stack — Ed Murphy walking with his perpetual limp, and chewing tobacco. Ed was small, black and hairy, with hair sticking out of his ears. His body looked hard and twisted all over — like something gnarled — though he was perfectly straight, except for the one leg which he had injured in a fall. His brother with him, Mike, was heavy and stupid.

“Hah! Hah! Hah!” laughed Mike as Peter hastily crawled out from underneath the wagon.

“Hitch him up!” laughed Mike, spitting and winking, as Peter rose up between the shafts.

Ed Murphy smiled his wry twisted smile, winked, then

limped around to untie the horses. Mike continued to laugh.

“Say, how’s the air up there?” he laughed.

But then Ed called him to help with the harnessing. Peter walked past the two of them, to rejoin Hansen on the other side of the stack. He went stiff-legged, truculent, feeling Mike’s heavy amused gaze upon him still as he rounded the corner of the stack. Sundquist and Tom Murphy and Hansen had already begun to unload the wagon under which lunch had been eaten. Anna was stooped over in front of the wagon, scraping off the dishes and putting them back into the baskets noisily. She looked up as he approached and Hansen on top of the stack called:

“Where you been? Come on! Yoomp!”

Peter went slowly up the ladder. Crudely but solidly built of odd pieces of timber, it held his weight; but it creaked and swayed and pressed deep into the side of the stack. The stack was hotter than ever. It must have been absorbing the sun’s heat steadily all the time they were at luncheon. Sweat was pouring from him before he had been working a minute. Hansen was particularly careful

now about the edges of the stack, that they should be even and well-laid.

Peter saw Anna with her three baskets again in position, trudging back across the yellow fields toward the farm-house. He experienced a quick, strange feeling of regret which he resented — regret that she was leaving him with these five loud and hostile small men, that she was taking away her own small but kind and solemn presence.

Once he saw her turn, slowly wheeling with her three baskets, and she looked back. It seemed to him that she looked straight at him standing high above the flat fields upon the yellow stack. He wondered if she saw him smaller, too, whether shrunk to pigmy proportions or big

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 204

as ever upon the distance — diminished stack, unchangeably big upon that soft and yellow oblong shape.

They worked steadily all afternoon and the stack rose higher and higher. At last they began to roof it, tapering it in. The hay had to be laid with extra care. Old Hansen cursed and the tapering hot stack seemed grown round and slippery. Separate strands of hay, like

strands of smooth blond hair, gleamed in the horizontal rays of the setting sun.

Peter stepped softly on aching feet, feeling the footing precarious. The hay would come up on the pulley-like a great rumpled hairy head. He would grasp it as it swung, then push it to wherever Hansen wanted it. It would turn and twist in his hands as he pushed it on the creaking pulley. Hansen would stand fussing, stamping his feet. Then Hansen would yell and Peter would release the hold of the fork on the hay. The hay would come down with a flounce upon the place indicated — a rumpled disordered mass, to be smoothed and straightened, combed into position.

Now Hansen was walking all around over the great sloping surface of the stack, marking soft places and stamping upon them, filling them over with hay and smoothing them. The shadows lengthened. Peter, standing motionless, with aching muscles, on the very middle and highest point of the stack, saw the sun, red as a beet, hanging between the flat edge of the sky and the brink of the flat fields.

Ed Murphy estimated a good two loads left. Those for the barn. Now the stack was finished. Its rounded, smooth top glistened,

turning sickly violet in the last rays of the sun. Hansen took long strands of wire, with small logs tied to each end, and stretched them crosswise over the top of the stack, a wire every few feet. The logs hung down

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 205

on each side of the stack. The taut wire, gleaming metallic, bit into the smooth surface of the hay.

The stack would be safe against wind and rain and snow. It would shrink, grow into itself. By the time next Spring came, if it were left that long, it would be scarcely half its present height; but it would hold itself inviolate. Deep within it and sweet, the hay was stored.

"All right," said Hansen at last, surveying his work.

He took off his hat and scratched his bald head. His round face looked happy. He went once more all around the edge of the stack, stamping down hard upon it, poking into it with his pitchfork, grinning. It was everywhere firm, glossy, smooth.

"Vell, get down," he said over his shoulder to Peter.

But he did not seem to want to get down himself. He continued to walk all around the edge of the stack, stamping and grinning, paying no attention to Peter who went with slow steps down the ladder on one side as the sun sank behind the other.

Peter followed the wagons home over the fields. Sundquist drove one wagon; Ed Murphy the other, with Hansen sitting up beside him. Mike and Tom Murphy stretched luxurious on top of the loads of hay, their hands behind their heads, as the wagons jounced along. Soon Peter was left behind.

He walked on slowly across the shorn fields. His muscles were tired and his head weary. It was growing dark rapidly. He was all alone now. There were long purple shadows, inexplicable, cast by no trees, no upright objects.

The sun had gone completely down beyond the horizon. It was absolutely quiet. There were not even the sounds of birds. Big and alone, Peter went slowly across the flat fields, among the flat purple shadows, following the two wagon-loads of little men back to the small farmhouse.

It was Sunday. A light rain fell gently straight down. Peter sat just inside the barn door on an old horse blanket on the floor. Hansen was in the house asleep. Anna was in the kitchen, washing up the dishes from the noon dinner. There was nothing for Peter to do but watch the rain.

A mud-hole was outside the barn door. Wagon-ruts through the soft mud had filled with water, coffee-colored liquid, pocked by the slow rain. Footprints of horses and cows, filled with water, stood out very plain; and there was his own large footprint, like a little lagoon in the center of the mud where he had stepped in entering the barn. Though that was well over an hour ago, his shoe was still wet. The water had soaked in through a torn place in the sole. The other shoe was wet, too; and his feet inside felt water-logged and sore.

He sat cross-legged, his head and shoulders hunched forward, his hands flat on the floor. It had been raining steadily all day; but the heat had not appreciably diminished. The earth seemed to have stored-up heat from the days of sun preceding; the air was warm and close; and the rain itself was warmish. In the

kitchen during dinner it had been stifling hot, with the coal stove going. Drops of sweat had rolled from Anna's arms into the stew.

He found himself watching a duck which had come around the corner of the barn. The duck waddled slowly toward the mud-hole, turning its head right and left, seeming to keep a very bright look-out from its two beady eyes. The duck reached the mud-hole and settled down into the lagoon formed by Peter's shoe. It would sit down very gingerly, like a little old lady, then jump up and shake its wings, half-spreading them. The lagoon just fitted it.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 207

Peter was motionless, watching the duck. The duck seemed to have no graces whatever, being muddy-colored, short-necked, clumsy in all its movements. But it was thoroughly enjoying the mud-hole.

It occurred to Peter that he might take a bath himself; he could carry a tub of water into the barn and sponge himself off as he had done last Sunday. But he felt listless. He did not want to do anything. This morning he had tried to re-read the letter from his father which had come to him the day before. When

he had first received it — Anna had brought it out to him in the fields — he had read it through in a hurry, crumpled it up angrily, and thrust it into his pocket. It had been a simple enough letter, short and to the point:

Evidently his father had had him traced. His father was glad that he was on a farm. They all had been very worried. His father was sending him a box containing two of his special blankets, some clothes, and other things. His father enclosed a check for two hundred dollars. The two hundred dollars would be repeated every month. If he wanted to stay where he was, “Fine, *stick to it!*” If he wanted to travel, to go to France, for instance, his father would finance that, too. Or if he liked farming, maybe his father would buy him a small farm of his own where he could have all the exercise he needed and sun and fresh air — why not? But if he was not satisfied where he was, “Do not *run away* again. Come home and we will have a long talk. Meanwhile God bless you, boy, and much love — Father.”

Peter could perfectly remember the letter from his hasty reading of it the day before. And he remembered how angered he had been by it all, the “God bless yous” included, and

the check — the check especially. He could remember all this but he could no longer feel any emotion about the

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 208

letter. And when this morning he had tried to re-read it, he had found it almost impossible to do so. Of course, crumpled as it was and written in his father's loose and shaky hand with green ink on blue office paper, it had strained his eyes. But that was not all. He had found it difficult even to follow the meaning of what he read. Upon one short passage he had concentrated for minute after minute without deducing any meaning from it at all. It had worried him. He had thought it indicated the result of the kind of life he was leading. He had taken out of his pocket the crumpled check for two hundred dollars. He had smoothed it out carefully and had held it up to his eyes, studying it as religiously as he had studied the letter. But he had not been able to reach any conclusion about it, either.

The check was in his pocket now. He felt for it with his finger to make sure and at his movement the duck started up with a shiver of feathers from its lagoon. The duck stood a minute, its head cocked, giving him a very

intent, bright gaze, then it waddled slowly, with many pauses, away around the corner of the barn.

Now, once more, he could see nothing animate in the whole scene before him. Two hundred feet to the left was Hansen's house, small and of a dirty yellow color, and three slim scrubby elder trees, growing in a meager group near the kitchen door. A lane led straight down from the barn past the house to the county road. On the other side of this road invisible behind Hansen's yellow house, were the Murphys' big green and white house and bigger red barn.

From where Peter sat, he could see Hansen's house, the elder trees, the lane and a short section of clay road, three telephone poles, some barbed wire fence, and an endless vista of flat fields, brownish-wet under the rain.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 209

Having made the single movement which frightened the duck away and having ascertained that the check was in his pocket, he was now absolutely motionless again, cross-legged, hunched forward, staring out through the open barn door. The duck had left two very clear imprints among the others in

the mud; and these were rapidly filling with water. He did not believe the rain was falling fast enough to fill them so. Water must ooze up from the mud itself. The rain was even lighter now, a light mist, but falling straight down.

Behind him in the barn a horse stamped in its stall. Then for a long while there was no sound nor movement anywhere around him and he himself sat motionless, not thinking. He was surprised to see a man coming up the lane from the road. It was Sundquist. Sundquist had on a white shirt and his horn-rimmed spectacles which he wore only on Sundays and holidays.

Peter thought he was going to turn in at the house but he looked up and saw Peter and came on toward the barn. He circled the mud-hole carefully in his shiny shoes and then made a leap through the door.

"Nice weather for ducks," he said, standing in the open doorway, looking out.

Peter grunted. He had hardly ever been alone with Sundquist before and he did not like Sundquist. He was dully irritated, too, because Sundquist's body cut off a part of his view through the door.

“I was going to town,” said Sundquist, “but I didn’t get my date!”

He was looking at Peter sidewise, seeming a little uncomfortable. Peter said nothing. After several minutes Sundquist ventured:

“Ain’t much to do on a farm, huh?”

Peter shook his head, agreeing.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 210

“I ain’t a farmer myself,” Sundquist said. “I’ll be heading out again one of these days. I can’t stand the life.”

Pete: glanced at him. His pimply face seemed very serious, his blue eyes perfectly serious behind the decorative spectacles. Peter had hardly ever seen him before when he wasn’t cracking jokes.

“I’ve seen a lot of life, I have,” Sundquist said. “I’ve been in every state in this Union and I’ve been in Canada. I wasn’t made to sit around on a farm. If I had the jack, if I had a hundred bucks I’d clear out right now, by God!”

Peter thought of the two hundred-dollar check in his own pocket and was interested in spite of himself.

“You couldn’t go far on a hundred.”

Couldn't I?" Sundquist whistled. "Say, I could go to Mexico — I could go all the way to South America on that — and plenty left over, too."

Peter made no further comment, though he was interested. It would be impossible to deny that.

"Probably you haven't traveled much" said Sundquist. "I have, you bet, and I've seen plenty things, too. I'm twenty-five. How old are you?"

"Twenty-one," Peter admitted after a pause.

"Jesus Christ! Is that a fact? Only twenty-one?"

As Peter said nothing but scowled at the mud-hole there was silence for a minute while Sundquist shook his head, remarking finally.

"If I'd had your build at twenty-one, I'd be champion of the world today. How much do you weigh?"

Peter grunted.

"I don't know."

"Well, you weigh plenty," said Sundquist. "You're strong, too!"

His gaze, if a little patronizing, was so frankly admiring that Peter colored. He felt an impulse to tell Sundquist

how he had used to lift three hundred pounds over his head with one hand, in the University gymnasium; but then he frowned. He said nothing.

"I'll tell you what," said Sundquist suddenly, lowering his voice, "I've got some potato whisky over across the way. What do you say you and me do a little quiet boozing-kill time?"

As Peter remained silent, Sundquist added: "Hansen won't have to know nothing about it."

"What the hell is that to me?" said Peter quickly.

Sundquist smiled.

"All right, then, let's go!"

Without giving Peter a chance to say anything more, Sundquist started out through the door, circling the mud-hole again successfully. After hesitating a minute, Peter got to his feet. He bent low under the door, then leaped across the mud-hole, clearing it easily. He had not cared whether he stepped in the mud or not when he had entered the barn two hours before.

Sundquist walked briskly down the lane and Peter went slowly, taking short strides to

keep pace with him. They reached the county road and turned up it to the left. The Murphys' barn was bigger than Hansen's and more modern. It too, was painted red; but there was a row of windows in clean white frames all down one side. The Murphys' green and white house, though large, was dwarfed by the barn and looked rather dingy in comparison. No one was on the narrow porch in front of the house. The yard was empty and so was the barn.

"Mike and Tom's in town," Sundquist explained in a low voice. "Ed's asleep. And Edna," that was the Murphys' sister, "she's in the kitchen."

They went through the barn to the rear where there was a door open upon a pasture. Sundquist motioned Peter

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 212

to wait, and ran up a ladder into the loft. After a minute he came down, carrying a gallon jug three-quarters full of white potato whisky. Smiling, he held the glass jug up to the light which came in the open door, and shook it. White bubbles rose through the clear liquid.

Sundquist sat down on a battered old stool and Peter lowered himself to the floor which

was of concrete. Sundquist took a drink, choked, wiped the mouth of the jug with his sleeve, and handed it to Peter. It was potent stuff.

“Taste that rubber?” Sundquist said. “They stilled it through rubber.”

“Good stuff,” grunted Peter.

After they had gulped several rounds each, Sundquist corked the jug and stuck it inside an empty stall.

“Might as well have it out of the way if Ed comes along,” he said. “Ed don’t stand for drinking. That is, he drinks plenty himself, but no hand of his can touch a drop.”

“What business is it of his?”

Sundquist grinned.

“Say, he’s the boss, ain’t he?” He added reflectively: “The bastard!”

Peter was silent. He could feel Sundquist looking at him. The pasture stretched out beyond the open door, flat but pleasant green. Black and white cows grazed in it, Holsteins. There were cows in the barn behind them, too, and horses.

“Jesus, you are big,” Sundquist said. “I’d hate to stop one of them mitts of yours.”

In spite of himself Peter smiled deprecatingly.

“I know a lot of people I’d like to have you meet,” Sundquist went on, “I’d like to have you take a poke at them for me. Yessir, I’d be champion of the world today if I had your build!” He began to smile. “There’s only one little disadvantage I can think of — ”

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 213

He paused and Peter eyed him suspiciously.

“That’s with the ladies!” Sundquist said.

Peter’s face darkened.

“Yessir, I do think you might have some trouble with the ladies,” Sundquist said, laughing.

Peter sat silent, scowling out through the open door at the green pasture.

“Only Anna,” laughed Sundquist. “She’d take you on.”

But Sundquist stopped laughing the instant Peter turned his eyes on him. After a minute Peter said in a low voice:

“Never mind about all that.”

Sundquist looked puzzled.

“What’s the matter?”

Obviously Sundquist’s remarks had been perfectly good-natured, not intended to give offense. Peter felt rather ashamed of himself,

as though he were acting like a bully. He made his voice as hearty as he could.

“How about passing around that jug again?”

Sundquist got up, still with a puzzled look, and handed the jug to Peter. For a few minutes they were both silent, passing the jug back and forth with breathing spells between swigs.

Now Sundquist was obviously beginning to be a little drunk. Peter found it easy to direct the conversation away from himself into other less dangerous channels. Soon Sundquist was talking at length of wobblies, bumming, riding the blinds, and of San Francisco where, it seemed, he had lived several weeks with a Chinese girl. He had worked on freighters on the Great Lakes. He had worked as a roustabout on a Mississippi steamboat and had slept with a big black negress in New Orleans. Once he had been kicked off a train in the middle of a desert; even there he had found an Indian squaw to his taste. During the war he had worked in a shipyard, making fifteen dollars a day;

silk shirts, silk underwear, women and liquor — and if you got fired out of your job, there was another one waiting for you; those were the days!

Peter, listening and drinking, fell more and more under the sway of Sundquist's narrative and of the potato whisky. Somehow today he wanted to relax; he wanted to let Sundquist's narrative sway him. He did not for a minute forget that he was a giant and Sundquist a pigmy. He simply let himself go lax. And it was surprising what a difference it made in the way he felt. He felt as he had used to feel when he was at the University, listening to Charley talk about life.

To Sundquist the whole United States was a playground. He could go anywhere and find a job, find a woman. When he was tired, he moved on. Sometimes he starved; several times he had drunk champagne. He had been inside glittering Montreal whorehouses; he had lain drunk for days in low water-front saloons. He had been to Hollywood where thousands of beautiful girls, one just as beautiful as the other, were walking the streets, waiting to be fed chow mein. Any day now he would head out for Mexico. Mexico was just a step away. He had never been there

himself but he knew all about it. The Mexicans had a liquor that made you crazy for women. A few drinks and you couldn't get enough women. There were houses down there, full of dark-eyed señoritas. You'd be walking down the street and they'd take you by the arm. Christ, and with that liquor. Chile-con-carne, too, plenty of good things to eat. A man could live down there for a few dollars a month and have a house of his own, a Mexican girl to take care of him. They knew how to take care of you — "Want your slippers, honey? Lemme mix you a drink." Mexico. 'Course the U. S. A. had plenty. You wouldn't think it now, but Boston's full of broads. Easterners aren't so

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 215

slow. They know good things, too. Boston, New York, Chicago, Montreal and Winnipeg. Vancouver, Seattle, Frisco. And Mexico, sure. Europe even — a man can go there easy — stoke across, shovel manure. Lots of big cities there, big as Boston anyway, beautiful women, food and liquor. Christ, thousands of places a man can go. Singapore. There's women waiting everywhere. All a man's got to do is go and get them. There's good food

everywhere. There's big bright cities. There's liquor that'd make your hair stand on end.

"By Christ, I'm heading out tomorrow!"

Sundquist had just made this statement in a loud, impassioned voice and with one fist in the air; and Peter was trembling, quite carried away by what he had drunk and heard. And the barn had become shadowy, full of dim, soft shadows and the dim, soft plop of cowdung, the slow scrape of hooves. And the landscape outside had blurred and gone gray, the green pasture and the black and white cows, and this gray landscape had come close up to the open door so that it was impossible to see out. And it was no longer too hot or too damp or lonely or boring. All these things seemed to have happened at once or to have become perceptible all at once in the very moment that the spell was broken, in the very moment that a voice spoke out of the shadows close behind them.

"Doing a little drinking, hey?"

It was Ed Murphy, standing twisted in the shadows, with the hair sticking out of his ears and the wry smile on his lips.

Sundquist looked sobered immediately. He tried to hide the whisky jug between his legs;

but then he must have realized that it was no use.

“Yeah,” he answered in a low voice. And after a minute he added, “Join us, Ed?”

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 216

Ed Murphy paid no attention to this but stood hard and twisted, looking at the two of them. Peter could see Sundquist’s sobered face, all the light gone from it. Instantly he wanted to be conciliating, to patch things up between Sundquist and Ed Murphy, to patch up and restore the magic which had existed before Ed Murphy’s intrusion.

“It has been a rainy day,” he said thickly, with elaborate politeness, “hasn’t it, Mr. Murphy?”

Ed Murphy began to laugh, twisted with laughter.

“Sure has!”

He went with his crooked limp out of the barn. Sundquist remained silent, the jug between his knees. Peter felt a quick uncomfortable return of spite — and something like a sense of shame, to have been caught drinking like this by a pigmy dirt farmer with that farmer’s hired hand. But then he thought: “Oh, to hell with that for

tonight.” He put out his hand and rested it on Sundquist’s shoulder. Sundquist shook himself.

“The bastard!”

“I hope this won’t get you in bad,” Peter said.

“Oh, no,” Sundquist mocked. “Christ, no! ... But I don’t give a damn. I said I was clearing out and I will. I’ll head out tomorrow.”

Peter patted him on the shoulder. Sundquist handed him the jug without speaking.

After that everything became dim once more — the shadowy dim barn and the dim landscape close up like a curtain before the open door and their two forms motionless side by side. Perhaps things were even dimmer than they had been before. The close plop of cow-dung sounded distant, very soothing. He could not even see Sundquist’s face; and Sundquist’s voice was lulling. It rambled on and on and only certain words stood out dimly, very beautifully. There were dim patches of red and orange, as he

spoke, among the dark shadows in the barn. There were strange scents that mingled with

the smells of manure. The whole world a man's playground. Beauty everywhere. Go from place to place and every place new things for you. There was red and there was orange. Strange liquors — perfumes — spices. Such sweets to be tasted. Beautiful señoritas-mantillas. All the fruits hung heavy from the trees. The world a man's orchard — a man's garden. Beauty and love to be had for the taking.

He found himself standing up; and down below him, Sundquist was standing up, too. He had told Sundquist that he would go with him, they would go together down the open road, the wide open road to life. But Sundquist was laughing and patting him on the side and saying in a soothing voice:

“Sure! Sure!”

“But I've got two hundred dollars. We can head out together. We'll be like brothers.”

Sure! Sure!”

He could not understand why Sundquist should laugh at him when they were so close, like brothers. He tried to tell Sundquist what he had always felt, how what he had always wanted was to get away, too, to know life, to live.

“Sure! Sure!”

“But I’ve got two hundred dollars!”

“Let me see it.... It’s a check! I don’t get mixed up with no check. No, sir.”

“But we’ll go together — down the road — to the light — to the — ”

“Sure! Sure!”

Later, he was going back alone across the way, He did not know why he was alone, why he was going back to the little room in Hansen’s little house; but he was weeping sentimentally and telling himself sentimentally:

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 218

“It’s a shame. It’s a God-damned shame.”

The night was absolutely black and there was rain coming down. He could feel the rain upon his face and upon his outstretched hands. But he could not see anything. The road swayed gently far beneath him; the black earth swayed beneath his spread feet. He was in a void, black and streaming, treading the swaying edge of the spherical earth. If he fell, he would fall down past the earth, through the black void, down and down.

He did not know how he got into the lane; but the lane was unsteadier even than the road; and it was very narrow. He walked with

the greatest care, holding out his arms to balance himself. He walked up the lane.

Oh, but it would be entirely impossible for him to enter the small house, to go through that ridiculous small door. As he soon came to the house, he realized the impossibility of it. He stood in the rain, in the streaming black void, fumbling down with his hands for the top of the door and groaning. It was cruel ever to expect him to go through a door like that. Into the small house. Into the box-like room. He stood, groaning, leaning against the house.

There was a gust of warmer air upon his legs. He looked down and saw a flicker of light. The door had opened of itself beneath him. Very far down he saw the lighted oblong. There was a strange squat figure like a gnome looking up at him — a broad squat gnome in a white night-gown, holding a candle.

The gnome said:

“Shh!”

He saw that it was Anna. She muttered something in Swedish. She seized his belt and gave him a strong tug which almost upset him. He stopped groaning to scowl down at her.

“Coom!” she said in English.

She held him firmly by the belt. After scowling at her for a long time, he leaned over and stuck his head through the door. But he was sulking. He felt glad when his shoulders stuck tight inside the door jambs. He let her tug away with all her might, while he sulked, feeling glad; but at last he grew tired of the game and gave a great shove through the door so that he almost fell on top of her.

“Shh!” she said again.

“Oh, go to hell!” he muttered. But he resisted her no more. He felt suddenly very tired. Several times he would have dropped down and gone to sleep on the stairs; but she was insistent. And she was strong, though she was scarcely more than half his height. Perhaps because he was so exhausted, so unsteady on his legs, she could give him tugs that almost pulled him over. She got him up the stairs at last, then across the little landing through the door into his room. This room was so small he had to sleep diagonally in it, stretched across the floor from corner to corner.

She let go of him. He slumped down on his back and shut his eyes. He felt himself dropping effortless into sleep. There was only

the irritating consciousness of her. She still would not let him alone. Now she was tugging away at various parts of him. With peasant thoroughness she was undressing him, taking off his soaked wet clothes. First she was at his feet, unlacing his shoes. Then she had moved up to his neck and was struggling with his shirt collar. His eyes were closed; there was a delicious drowsiness upon him. Why couldn't she leave him in peace? Now she was at his middle, undoing his belt, unbuttoning his trousers. She was unbuttoning the underwear beneath his trousers.

He felt her hands rough against the tender skin and

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 220

opened his eyes, startled. She had set the candle on the floor. The candle-light flickered upon her white night-gown. Her hair was in a braid down her back and he could see her bare feet. Now he looked and saw both her breasts. As she was leaning over him, both of her big young breasts had come bulging out from her white night-gown. They hung large and yellow, fruit-like above his bare belly.

He sat up suddenly and put both arms around her. She did not move and he pulled

her down upon him. She was firm but soft. She was large, though so short. Her big breasts would almost fill his hands.

3

Peter could not sleep, though he was very tired and it was late at night.

Anna had been with him this evening again. As on nearly every evening during the past six weeks, she had waited until one hour after Hansen retired to bed. Then she had come, padding softly on her flat bare feet across the little landing from her room to Peter's. He had been lying on his blankets on the floor, reading by the light of an oil lamp. But he had heard her on the landing; then he had heard her at the door; and then he had seen her square within the doorway in her white cotton night-gown, her wide-set eyes shining cow-like above the flat cheeks. Since the night six weeks ago when he had first slept with her, she had formed this habit of bringing him up food to his bedroom — bread and meat of which he could eat endlessly. He never knew how she covered up her thefts with peasant stealth. Once he had asked her,

but she had not been able to understand.
Tonight she

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 221

had brought him two half-loaves of bread with butter smeared on them, a large ragged hunk of meat. Without a word she had set these things down on the floor beside him and he had not been able to resist but had devoured them on the instant. She had stood motionless, watching him eat, a curious dumb look in her eyes, as if she were proud of his eating.

He had been embarrassed as always by her presence, unable to meet her steady unblinking gaze.

As soon as he had finished eating, she had gathered her nightgown up around her waist, then had lain down on the floor beside him. As though it were a perfectly matter-of-fact thing, she would lie each night motionless, with her arms close to her sides and her legs spread slightly. Her body would be flat and thick and square, her big breasts flattened out and her belly flat, her eyes in her flat face staring straight upward with a dumb, expectant look.

In the small close room, which had seemed to press in upon the two of them, he had been almost painfully conscious of the odor of her body. There was a smell about Anna like the smell of hired girls he remembered from his childhood — like the smell he had noticed when he had investigated on rainy Thursday afternoons the hired girl's room. Not a dirty smell but an inferior one, inferior as the cheap oak dresser had been inferior, and the yellow-painted iron bed. The smell would fill him with repugnance for Anna — a sheer well-bred disgust, like an echo of his snobbish mother.

But Anna had another earthy smell besides. She smelled of the flat fields, of rich dirt turned up by the plow. He felt in her a force — but a rude and lowly force of nature. He did not admire nature. He was afraid of nature; and in his heart he was afraid of Anna. Built squat and strong and close to the earth, she had a force from the earth, a

downward pull of her own. When he was with her, he had most definitely again the feeling he had had on the night he ran away — that he himself was against nature, that his giant

body was an artificial structure maintaining itself above the flat earth only by an effort.

She would lie on the floor beside him each night, squat and square and motionless. She was earth — strong and feared nothing. She was as young as he was in years; but generations of earth people had given her their strength. And she could pull him down with it. It was craziness for him to lie there and be drawn to her. It was reckless, foolhardy. He was young like a new thing — like an experiment in race. He was fragile for all his strength, for all his great size. It was a noble and difficult thing to walk upright as he did in his giant stature.

Perhaps she was being daring, too; to sleep thus with a giant — to offer her body like the bread and meat to starved giant appetites. But it was an easier thing for her; and she was a stronger, surer person. All around this house, outside the single window and the thin walls of the small room were the flat fields, pressing in, giving her their strength. There was the earth, which he must spurn with every step, sustaining her, welling up through her, drawing him down, drawing his big body down.

And he was not able to resist her. Against her slow sure force he was powerless. He could not longer maintain himself. He forgot his disgust, his fear. All things were suddenly subordinate to a desire to be inside of her. It was as if he wanted to bury himself in the rich earth, to flatten himself. He would not touch her coarse red hands; he would not kiss her lips; and he would shut his nostrils against the smell of her body. Only for this long moment he would strain to go within her, to hide himself. He would feel her whole body, small and square and flat

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 223

beneath his loins and he would feel the earth in her and beneath her, sustaining her. He would press down upon her suddenly with all his might. He would be clawing with his hands at the dirty-papered walls and his feet would claw the opposite walls. There would be all that length of his body which was not upon her, his chest and shoulders and arms and all his lower legs, jerking, purposeless. Only his down-pressing loins, his lean belly against her two breasts, against her open mouth, would be certain and swift, like a large animal in flight, wanting to bury itself in the

earth, wanting to be drawn down and absorbed. And there was a pleasure in this swift purposeful downward movement such as he had never dreamed of a giant's having. In the coward impulse he would forget himself. He would forget her. When she gave out muffled squeals of ecstasy, he would be borne along, shaken — like a white mountain shaken — and squalling himself.

After it was over, it would be every night the same. Small and square, she would lie silent on the floor as if she were crushed, as if the dark earthy edifice of her had been completely broken in, like a cave. He would be trembling and would pull himself away from her. He would cramp himself into a corner of the room as into a vise. For minute after minute she would lie silent, flat, crushed, while he crouched in his corner, as far away from her as he could get and in as nearly upright a position as possible. All this time he would be recollecting himself, marshaling himself as though he were a scattered army, sending down through his shaken limbs the interrupted current of his giant being.

A little later as she still lay motionless, he would be filled with a great disgust for her

and for himself. It was no moral feeling that he had. And it was no memory of what

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 224

his father had told him following the affair with Miss Whitefield. After all, in the deed accomplished, that doubt had been set at rest. It even pleased him to think that he might be spoiling her physically for other men, for pigmy men. No, it was nothing as simple as that. It was rather a consciousness of some fundamental law trespassed. There were no tablets behind him which he followed. There was no inherited giants' ethic. Yet he knew with a certainty that what he had done was not right. It was not right for a giant to come into a pigmy woman.

So he would become fearful, too. His trespass against this new unfamiliar law, which no one had ever told him existed — which had not existed before him perhaps — filled him with an old and familiar sense of shame. He felt as he had once felt when a child, playing with matches in a dark closet. He feared punishment. He feared a swift and terrible retribution. He would listen for sounds in the silent house. If a board creaked, he would start and tremble. He wanted

desperately to hurry Anna out of his room, to shut the door upon her; but he could not bring himself even to speak to her. Perhaps Hansen had heard. Though he was a little deaf and though he seemed to sleep like one dead, it was impossible that he had not heard a giant's squalls. In a minute he would open the door and discover them in their shame. Hansen and Anna were perfectly alike; and they were going to be married. It was he who was the interloper. He had no business with Anna or with Hansen. A giant had no business to meddle in the affairs of pigmy people. It was not right for a giant to come into a pigmy woman.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 225

4

Peter had worked the whole morning, following Hansen's orders, trying to build a platform for a small gas engine to stand on. The engine was to be used for pumping water out of the well for the stock. It was a job which should have taken half an hour at most, according to Hansen. Peter had worked at it all the morning, sawing the rough boards with great care and concentration, as if he were a

cabinet-maker constructing a small and intricate piece of furniture. The saw in his big hands had twisted and slipped and the hammer had slipped. He had found it impossible to drive the three-inch spikes true. He had been all the morning sawing, tapping, with a scowl on his face and his eyes narrowed.

Now here was Hansen in from the fields at noon, come to survey his handiwork.

“Yeesus,” said Hansen, leaning over the platform. He shook his head. “Yeesus!”

And though Peter had tried hard, had put forth his best endeavor, he could see as well as Hansen himself that this giant’s work was flimsy. Because it had been fashioned by a giant working with pigmy tools, the platform was crooked, with most of the boards splintered, and the spikes driven into hollow places, holding nothing together.

“Yeesus!”

With a single quick movement of his short bowed leg, Hansen kicked the flimsy platform into pieces. He stood looking up at Peter, frowning, contemptuous. Peter did not move; but there were his eyes narrowed, and his thin nostrils dilated and the heavy scowl upon his face.

After a minute Hansen jerked his gaze away.

“Vell, go into the house. It’s time for dinner.”

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 226

Still Peter did not move. He stood scowling as Hansen walked hurriedly away across the barnyard toward the kitchen door. “My Jesus!” he was thinking. “My good Jesus Christ! What a hell of a giant I turned out to be!”

Suddenly he jammed one hand down into his trousers pocket and pulled out his wallet. There were two checks in his wallet from his father’s bank. He had not cashed them. In a few days would come another. That would be six hundred dollars.

Why should he not take advantage of this money to go away — as Sundquist had gone, two months before?

He stood bolt upright, holding the wallet in his hand. He remembered how he had run away from home on the night of his madness — somehow splendid — somehow fine — leaping in the moonlight, laughing aloud. He had been so sure of himself then. He was sure of himself now but his ideas had become blurred. For some reason he could never see

things clear. What was clear one minute was blurred the next. His life seemed to have many patterns and they were always shifting; in his mind they were shifting.

Of course he wanted to be independent. Of course he wanted no man to be responsible for him, his actions. It made it all the worse that his father was a pigmy and he a giant. But could the life he was leading now be called independent? Was there anything noble in standing squarely on his own feet when his feet were sunk in a pile of manure? My God, a giant had no business on a Minnesota farm, losing himself in close physical communion with a pigmy peasant woman and in the lowliest tasks of the pigmy world.

Did not his father owe him a living anyway? How came this little short strange man to be his father? He

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 227

had asked himself that question many times. Were not these two checks in his wallet, and the others that were promised, a kind of hush money, a conscience bribe?

Suddenly he kicked at one of the loose boards from the wrecked platform. The board sailed into the air, lit inside a pig sty twenty

feet away. He stood motionless, scowling. Obscurely within himself he felt that there was — explaining all this savage predicament of his — a fault and that the fault was not his. If he was born a giant into this world, then no one could blame him for not fitting in. His father might put forth a thousand disclaimers in the name of God's will. The fact remained that his father was his father — sire to a giant. How had that come about?

How?

5

On hands and knees Peter crawled to the door of his room and opened it. There was no light save that which streamed out of the room behind him. He made very little noise as he crept into the square hall, then turned, and shut the door. Now he was in absolute darkness. Anna's room was across the landing, three feet from his crouching body. Hansen's room was upon the other side of the open well of the staircase. He put his head to the door of Anna's room and heard long gurgling snores.

He shuddered. There was a picture of Anna that he could not forget. He saw her as he had

seen her early that evening, crossing the barnyard, carrying a pail of milk, going toward the smoky light oblong of the kitchen door. Her feet had made no sound in the dust of the barnyard; but the milk in the pail had made a gentle lapping sound. He had watched her broad hips and heavy movements; and as she had entered the kitchen, he had seen

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 228

her in outline against the smoky light oblong. She had seemed full of portent.

He hooked one finger around the slippery door knob and turned it. The door swung open. Now he could hear the snores very close, long and gurgling. He moved slowly, foot by foot, inside and closed the door. He had never been in her room before. He began to move forward, feeling out ahead of him. Something bumped his arm; he found it to be a table. Immediately afterward, he encountered a corner of the bed. It was some kind of metal bed and jingled as he touched it. The snores continued unabated; and he could tell from their direction that he was at the foot of the bed. He placed one finger upon the edge of the mattress to guide himself. Rising up on his knees, he crouched above the bed. He located

the pillow; then his tracing finger encountered her face. Promptly he closed his whole hand upon her head, as a man might grasp a baseball. The snores stopped abruptly. He could see nothing.

“Anna,” he whispered, “don’t cry out. It’s me.”

He knew she would recognize his voice and waited until she would have had time to recover from the shock; then slowly he loosened his hold on her head. Immediately she took a long gasping breath.

“Anna,” he whispered, “Anna.”

He heard her answering whisper, high, a little breath-less, but matter-of-fact.

“Ja? Ja?”

His agitation overcame him suddenly. He put his hand upon her shoulder, almost lifting her from the bed.

“Anna! Do you understand me? You must tell me! Are you going to have a baby, Anna?”

His hand grasping her shoulder shook. It must have hurt her cruelly.

“Baby?” she repeated after him, pronouncing the word strangely in her matter-of-fact high whisper.

“Yes, yes! You understand? Baby. Baby.”

She was silent; but he felt sure that she had understood.

“Anna,” he begged, striving to control himself, “don’t you understand? You must tell me. I must know.”

Her body seemed heavier, an unwilling weight in his hand.

“Baby?” she said again.

He was weak with suspense, sweaty, trembling. In his desperation he placed his other hand upon her belly.

“Baby,” he said, and patted her belly. “Baby. Baby.”

Again she was silent; but then he heard her sigh.

“*Ja, Ja,*” she whispered. “Baby, yes. *Ja, Ja.*”

He crouched, transfixed, holding the heavy lump of her body, hearing her dumb regretful sighing.

“*Ja, Ja,*” she whispered. *Ja, ja.* Yes, baby.”

He let her fall back upon the bed which jingled. His own body shook convulsively. He did not know much about such things but he knew that this could be no ordinary pregnancy. Though it was only two months from the time he had first slept with her, her belly was already large, portentous. In her

pigmy belly he must have left a giant embryo. It was a white seed that would swell and swell; it would most terribly wound, distend her; and at the last it would kill her ...

Suddenly there was sweat on every part of his body.

There was a river of sweat running down the gully of his chest.

“Oh, God! Oh, God!” he whispered.

Now he could see the full significance of what he had done. For it was like a cycle and he was perpetuating the sin of that terrible short man, his father. Often, in his deepest innermost consciousness, he had wondered whether

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 230

his father had not held some dark impulse — some mighty and presumptuous and evil ambition — when he went into Peter’s mother, bearing the seeds of a giant, impregnating her. It was a thought like some of those which had risen muddy and turbulent in his mind, during the night of his madness when he ran away. It was a thought which he had never really looked upon.

But now, as he crouched trembling above the small bed in the box-like room, above the

small but solid heavy-breathing peasant woman, the thought rose terrifying and clear out of his deep consciousness. He saw it suddenly before him in vivid realistic detail as if he were witnessing the rape of his own mother. He could see her white agonized face and her legs widespread and the little terrible short man upon her; and he felt a strong aversion to them both. Out of the sexual memories that were filling him, out of his own experience, he built this scene. And he seemed to recognize in his father's face, his own large features, passion — twisted, and his father's voice raised in a giant's squall.

“My father. Me!”

And now he, too, would have a son, a giant son. For Anna would die but the murderous seed itself would live. He saw this other giant born — born as he had been born to wake and moan in the bright, cramped, hostile world. He saw the flat earth peopled with a giant race. He saw his large and kindly giant offspring trudging lonely across yellow flat fields.

Was this his function? Was it for this that he had lived?

A race of giants conceived in sin, carved out of broken pigmy bellies. He remembered how

in dreams he had waked rejoicing. He had rushed out shouting into the new giant day — into a world gloriously transformed over night.

“Baby?” he asked her again in a choking voice, “Baby?”

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 231

“Ja, ja,” she whispered, heavy regretful. “Ja, ja ... Ja, ja.”

Why did he not immediately kill her? Why should he hesitate when the fact was plain before him? In one minute he could cut the terrible cycle short, kill Anna, then himself.

He felt her two arms around his hand. She was murmuring words in Swedish. Now she was rubbing her wet eyes upon his hand. He disengaged himself suddenly. He left her moaning softly, flat upon the bed.

6

How was it that Hansen had not seen before this? Sometimes in the evenings after dinner, the three of them would be in the kitchen: Anna washing dishes; Hansen seated at the table near the lamp, mumbling over the

county newspaper; Peter sprawled on the floor, scowling from one to the other of them.

Peter, watching Anna, would feel that she was visibly swelling. Her belly stuck out. It swayed from side to side as she walked. One evening, standing on a chair to reach a high shelf, she had slipped and almost fallen. He had jumped to his feet, seized with a sudden panic; but she had recovered her balance. Then he had sat down again and had begun to laugh. Anna had turned to stare at him wonderingly. Hansen, too, had looked up from his newspaper in surprise. How stupid Hansen was! Anna, the pigmy Anna with a giant inside her — yet Hansen had not seen.

Now he was seeing. Peter was sure of that. The instant Peter had noticed Edna Murphy standing in the early autumn twilight by the corner of the barn, talking to old Hansen so solemnly, so sadly, he had known why she had

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 232

come. He had known that things were being brought to a head. And he was glad. He could see Hansen's red cheeks growing extraordinarily red until they seemed to flame in the shadows. He could see Edna, tall and bony and with a horse-face and her arms close

to her sides. All this he could see from the little side room in the barn where he knelt by the cream separator, turning it around and around with steady unchanging speed as Hansen had taught him to do.

On a sudden both Edna and Hansen turned and looked toward the farmhouse. Peter looked too, and saw that the lamp had been lit in the kitchen. Anna's head, bent over, was just visible through the kitchen window. Probably she was setting out dishes on the table.

Peter had to bite his lip to keep from laughing. Now he could hear Hansen's voice, rising, getting more angry. And Edna was growing stiffer. He could see her bony stiffness. Hansen must be swearing. Edna would not like that. Besides, her mission was accomplished. She went quickly away down the lane, her arms close to her sides.

Hansen stood a minute, staring after her; then looked once more toward the kitchen window. He threw back his shoulders. With exaggerated heavy strides as though he were really big, ponderously big, the funny little man, he walked across the barnyard. He opened the kitchen door, went in, and slammed it behind him.

Peter circled his lips with his tongue. He began to turn the separator faster now, so fast that the milk splattered out upon him. Suddenly he laughed outright. He gave the separator a push and the whole thing fell over. He could hear the milk gurgling as it spilled onto the floor. He got to his feet, still laughing, rubbing his hands together. His fingers were sticky with milk. He went out of the barn and swiftly across the yard.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 233

Hansen had his hand raised when Peter came into the kitchen. Evidently he had already dealt Anna several blows. One of her eyes looked red and watery and was beginning to puff out. She must have been standing there, perfectly solid, letting him hit her; but when she saw Peter come, stooped over, into the kitchen, and saw him grinning, she clapped her hand over her mouth and screamed. Hansen turned and gave Peter a brief angry glance.

“Somebody knock her up,” he yelled. “By Yeesus I find out—”

He raised his hand again to strike her. Peter seized the hand in one of his big fists. He jerked Hansen around facing him.

"I wouldn't do that," he said. "Let me tell you a secret, little man." He pointed at Anna's belly and laughed.

"That's a giant. Do you understand?"

"What?" yelled Hansen.

"Mine," said Peter, pointing at the belly. "Me!"

Hansen seemed thunderstruck.

"*Ja. Ja. Ja,*" laughed Peter. "That's right. You've got it."

"So!" said Hansen. He was struggling for breath. He looked apoplectic. "So!"

He did not seem to know what to do about it.

"So!"

Anna had been standing with an anxious expression on her face, watching the two of them. Now she tapped Hansen on the shoulder. She began chattering to him in Swedish, her voice low and earnest, and after a time he answered in Swedish. Peter smiled and smiled, towering over them, indulgent. Hansen looked up at last.

"She say that baby's Sundquist's." Hansen seemed very relieved. "That son-a-bitch!"

Peter ceased to smile.

“N—n—not yours,” stammered Hansen. He nodded his head as if to reassure Peter. “Sundquist’s. That son-a-bitch!”

Peter put both hands on Hansen suddenly and shook him until his head wobbled on his neck.

“She’s lying! It’s my baby! Mine!”

“N—n—no,” stammered Hansen. “N—n—no. Sundquist’s.”

In a kind of instinctive fury Peter shook Hansen up and down, up and down. Anna screamed again. Peter gave Hansen a contemptuous fling across the room. Hansen’s body crashed against the table. The table went over, the lamp with it. There was a minute of complete blackness; flames shot up. The flames seemed to shoot up from the dry floor itself. Peter stood watching, stupefied. Anna, with a cry, had rushed across the room. She was dragging Hansen’s inert body to the door. She got him as far as the threshold; but there he struggled to his own feet and pushed her away.

The kitchen was bright with the flames. The table was burning, so was the floor; and a curtain over the table had caught.

“Fire!” screamed Hansen, jumping up and down. “Fire! Help! Yeesus!”

He picked up a pail of water from behind the stove and dashed it on the flames. Then he ran out, yelling, the pail banging in his hand, toward the pump.

Peter shook his head and looked toward Anna. In the red light he could see her very plainly. She was standing in the center of the room, motionless, her large belly red-outlined, seeming more full of portent than ever before.

Hansen came rushing in, carrying another pail of water. He threw it on the burning planks of the floor. The water scattered the flames but did not put them out. Peter noticed a red spot appear on the hem of Anna's dress. The spot spread rapidly with jagged edges. He gave a low cry and

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 235

leaped toward her. With his big hands he crushed out the little flame. Then he picked her up in his arms. He picked her up tenderly as though she were an egg — gingerly, as though he were carrying the egg of a new race. He went carefully out the door and stood in front of the house, cradling her in his arms. For some reason she had begun to cry. She who was ordinarily so stolid was crying as if her heart would break.

“All right, Anna,” he said, soothingly. “All right, Anna. The baby.”

The flames were spreading inside the kitchen. He could see through the window how they licked the dirty walls. Abruptly Hansen appeared in the doorway, looking rather singed, bearing an alarm clock in one hand and a kitchen chair in the other. As his eyes fell upon Peter and Anna, he swore and hurled the alarm clock.

“Son-a-bitch!” he yelled.

The alarm clock banged against one of the three elder trees behind Peter. It fell in pieces to the ground. Peter looked down at Anna in his arms and hesitated. After a minute he turned his back on Hansen and began to walk slowly down the lane away from the burning house.

“Yeesus! Help! Help!” yelled Hansen, running back once more into the house.

Now Anna was murmuring brokenly in Swedish. Peter held her close against him as he walked down the lane. Just as he reached the county road, he met the three Murphy boys. They were running. Mike had a pitchfork in his hand. At sight of Peter with Anna in his arms, Ed Murphy stopped short

and the two others stopped. The three of them gathered around Peter.

“What the hell—” Ed Murphy began.

But Peter gave him a push and he fell. Instantly Mike Murphy jabbed at Peter’s ankles with his pitchfork and

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 236

Tom Murphy pawed at Peter’s arm which held Anna.

Peter wheeled suddenly and ran. Anna in his arms was screaming with steady peasant vigor. The Murphys made no attempt to follow, for at that moment Hansen burst out the front door of his house yelling:

“Help, boys! Help! Yeesus! Fire!”

Still Peter did not slow down. Looking back over his shoulder, he could see windows appearing red in the dark walls of the house. As he ran, he laughed. There was a strange exultation filling him. Anna had become silent. She was like a dead weight in his arms. He wondered what she was thinking.

“Don’t be afraid,” he soothed her, “don’t be afraid.”

Yet he knew she was afraid and he was glad. Now he had taken the step — the decisive step — and all nature feared him. He held Anna in

his arms high up from her mother earth, from her sustaining earth, and she was powerless. From now on it would be he who was strong. He felt within himself tremendous power — an inexhaustible force. For the first time in his life, with this pigmy woman in his arms, he was really a giant. He was altogether a giant. He felt a kind of jubilation. His feet kicked at the earth as though they were kicking a round ball.

Now he had Anna in his power and he would carry her away with him. Against nature, against God, if there were a god he would prevail. Anna would not be the only one. He would get other women — many women. He would lift them out of their element — away from the base earth. He would carry them away by force to his high fastness which he would build, and there he would breed giants one after another. He would breed up a race of giants that would finally and forever wipe the pigmies from the earth. Out of their own pigmy women he would breed the pigmies destruction. Down below in the cubicle houses and offices

of crowded cities, in low sprawled dwellings upon the flat prairies, the pigmies would continue to fight over business — advertising, to root like pigs in the black earth for their sustenance. All the time he would be breeding up the giants that would be their destruction. What if the pigmy women died for the burdens he placed in them. Giant and pigmies were enemies, foreordained, inevitable, and this was war that had broken out between them. This was war without mercy, without quarter. It could only end in the destruction of the one party or the other.

“Yes, war,” he thought exultantly. “War!”

Here was something open with which he could cope. All their overwhelming numbers would mean nothing to him now. He would drive them out of their petty ambushes, their lies, their deceits, and in the open he would beat them. This time history would be reversed and it would be the giants who prevailed. The pigmies never would have won at all had the giants not gone trusting them, ignorant of their baseness, their ancient small craftiness. But he knew the pigmies, for he had lived among them. And he would trust no one of them. He would kill them all.

“Yes, this is war,” he muttered. “This is war. This is what I’ve been waiting for — what they’ve driven me to — and I’ve made myself ready. Let it come. I’m ready.”

When he had gone perhaps two miles along the county road, he stopped to rest a minute. He set Anna down on the ground, down on the flat earth, for he was no longer afraid of her. He feared nothing. But he stood above her, watching to make sure she would not try to run away. Of course he did not trust her. She was a pigmy of the pigmies. She was his prisoner. That was all. If he was gentle toward her, it was not for herself but for what was in her — the precious burden.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 238

He stood motionless above her, swaying slightly. Far across the flat country he could see a red glow which must be the glow from Hansen’s burning house. He smiled to see it. Just so all the pigmy houses would burn, would crumble. He thought of the house he himself would build. He would make it an outpost of the new giant civilization — a kind of laboratory in which the strange heavy elements of the new world would be weighed and tried. All the pigmy women with whom

he would surround himself would feel like the pigmies they were, going up the front steps on all fours, standing on tiptoe to reach the door-knob, sitting in his big living room, lost in the depths of his big chairs, looking up frightened at the lofty ceilings.

Anna on the ground at his feet was moaning. He bent over her, solicitous.

“Do you feel all right, Anna?”

But she made him no answer. Probably she did not understand. She went on moaning.

He began to smile at her. With his hand he touched her belly, just patting it gently.

“My baby, Anna,” he said proudly. “A giant.”

She suddenly sat bolt upright.

“No, no, no,” she cried. “Sundquist. Sundquist.”

He laughed to think what a pigmy she was.

“It won’t do you any good to lie to me, Anna.”

She wrung her hands and began to cry.

“Sundquist baby,” she kept saying. “Sundquist baby.” She indicated her big belly. “Seven month,” she said.

He began to frown. Suddenly he knelt down on the ground beside her.

“What do you mean?” he asked, looking into her face. He took her head in his hands

and forced it up. In the darkness he could just dimly see her eyes but he could see that they were looking into his, steady, unblinking.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 239

“Whose baby? Whose baby, Anna?”

“Sundquist,” she said slowly, and as if regretfully. “*Ja. Ja. Ja.* Sundquist.”

And she was not lying. He knew that now.

He threw her violently backward and staggered to his feet. She wrapped her arms around one of his ankles, looking up at him pleadingly. But he kicked her from him. She lay flat on the ground, staring up.

“But there are others,” he screamed. “By God, there are others. By God—”

Suddenly he began running back along the road in the direction he had come from. There was a terrible jangling confusion in his head, but one purpose, too, one indomitable resolve. He would get other women. He would get many women. Now he had thought of Edna Murphy. She was strict and a virgin. He would take her away first. He had all his seeds to sow. He must sow where he could. He must sow fast. For this was war which had come. And the pigmies, he knew, were savage, crafty and vengeful.

He ran as fast as he could. He ran with tremendous speed but he felt dizzy and his feet kept slipping under him. Once everything seemed to blur before his eyes but he shook his head and his vision cleared. He went plunging on. As he came closer, he could see more and more red on the horizon. Soon he could see the actual flames shooting up, red punctures of flame upon the red horizon. He had almost reached the Murphys' house when he over-took two farm women who were running like himself along the road in the direction of the fire. He did not know who they were. He did not even know whether he had ever seen them before. Yet as if by some instinct, he reached out his hands toward them. He caught one of them in each hand.

"You're coming away with me," he gasped.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 240

He picked the one of them up, tucked her under his arm. But the other broke from him, began to run along the road. They were both screaming most dismally, and the one under his arm was scratching and kicking. He tightened his hold on her slightly and she groaned, ceasing her struggles. He started off after his other woman who was escaping. He

had almost caught up with her, was reaching out his hand toward her to pluck her from the ground, when he stumbled. As he fell, his grip on the woman he was carrying, loosened. She rolled out from under his arm like a football. She rolled a length beyond him and lay an instant. Then she was on her feet again and off up the road. Both women were now running together up the road, into the red glare of the fire, their necks thrust forward, shrieking at the top of their voices.

He got to his feet slowly, for the fall had shaken him. He ran heavily in pursuit of the two women. But when he saw them turn up the lane toward Hansen's burning house, he hesitated. After a minute he lumbered to a stop. He stood, breathing heavily, in the center of the road, not far from where he had encountered the three Murphy boys. He stood watching the two women run up the red lane. Hansen's house was already in ruins. The roof had fallen in and the interior was ablaze, with flames shooting up high. He was surprised that such a little house should make such a big fire. There were many men and women standing around in groups. They all looked red in the red light from the flames, and they all looked exceptionally small, like a circle of

small red pigmies gathered for some savage ceremonial. He stood watching them curiously, a smile on his lips. His two fleeing women had at last reached the top of the lane. He could see them waving their arms in the air and he could see all the other pigmies

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 241

in the red light running toward them, beginning to gather around them.

He roused himself, snorted, wheeled in the darkness, ran with his long, heavy strides toward the Murphys' house, silent as if deserted, on the other side of the road. He was certain that Edna would be there. He rounded the corner of the barn and saw that there was indeed a light in the kitchen. Edna was not the kind to run to fires, even though they might be directly across the road. Besides, Hansen had just this evening sworn in her presence. As he passed the open door of the barn he heard the horses stamping in their stalls and one of them neighing. Swiftly but very cautiously, he approached the house; with infinite care lowered his head so that he could peer through the lighted kitchen window. The kitchen was empty, a large bare room, neat and clean. There was a lamp on a table; there

were several pots bubbling on the stove. But there was no one in the room. He bent and opened the door. The kitchen ceiling was so very low that he had to move forward in a crouch; and in order that he might move stealthily he steadied himself with his knuckles on the floor. He saw a curtained doorway leading out of the kitchen into the interior of the house. He held the curtain to one side and pushed his body through. He found himself in a kind of long hall, dark except for a red streak of light which came through the window at the far end. Until his eyes should become accustomed to this light, he stood absolutely motionless, bent over beneath the low ceiling, but he felt that his breath blew like a wind through the narrow hall. He began to creep forward, feeling his way cautiously, his knuckles on the floor. Now he saw something moving near the window through which the light came. He crept closer and saw that it was Edna. She was standing in the darkness, her eyes glued to the window, craning her long, bony neck from

one side to the other, obviously engrossed in the spectacle of the fire. He waited a minute,

then pounced upon her. She gave a most terrible scream as he seized her. He hooked his arms around her, one hand over her mouth. He dragged her back along the passage, then through the quiet, bare kitchen where the pots bubbled on the stove. The instant he was outside the house he swung her up under his arm and began to run with her. But she had managed to fasten her teeth into the fleshy part of his palm. She bit with all her might; then, as he jerked his hand away, she screamed. He struck her with the back of his hand but she went on screaming. He felt her body hard and bony as though he were carrying a bundle of rods; and her voice raised in a high screech was hard.

He rounded the corner of the big barn and stopped. Immediately before him was a crowd of men and boys rushing toward him down the red lane from the burning house. He recognized the three Murphys, other neighboring farmers, a whole stream of pigmy people. He grumbled in his throat, then turned and started running up the county road away from them. But he knew by their shouts that they had seen him. Now he was running with all the strength that was in him. His chest was heaving from his exertions and

the sweat poured down his face. As Edna kept screeching, he struck her again and again on the mouth but that did not stop her.

“Jesus, what a woman!” he thought.

He had not run far when he heard the noise of an auto behind him. He whirled and saw the two headlights bearing down on him. He jumped from the road, leaped over a fence, and began running across the flat fields. But a shot rang out and though he felt no pain, he discovered that he was limping.

He stopped to rub his leg. He held his hand up before

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 243

his eyes. He could not see it, but he knew it was sticky with blood. Edna had not for a minute ceased her screeching. Suddenly he swore and flung her to the ground. A blind rage filled him. He began to run back in the direction of the road. He could see by their headlights that there were now three or four cars drawn up in one spot, and he could see dark pigmy figures clustered around them. He ran straight toward the cars. He heard a shouting, then several shots. Though he was not conscious that he had been hit again, he began to stagger and to veer. Presently he was

aware of a dark, small figure close beneath him and he tried to strike down at it but his fist swinging was like a weight which whirled him around. He felt that he was falling. He was falling down a great distance, down from a great height. He was falling flat on the flat earth, all his body flat with the earth....

He could hear dimly voices. And he could feel small hands upon him, savage small hands. He could feel small boots kicking into him. He could see dimly a blur. He struggled to a sitting position. But something forced him down again. Now he could hear the voices more plainly, small and hostile. Some one kicked him in the face and he smelt the leather, the manure, the caked rich earth. He could not move his arms. Perhaps they were pinioned; perhaps they had been broken or shot useless. He could not tell. But something was straining at his legs. He blinked and blinked. He could see figures moving near him in a strange glary light which seemed to come from the head-lights of the cars, small figures of men moving all around him. Only men. The crafty pigmies had hidden their women away.

He seemed to be in the center of a field, stretched out flat upon the ground. He could

make out that there was a rope around each of his ankles. Each one of the ropes was

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 244

held by three or four men who were pulling with all their strength, pulling his legs apart — so far apart that the muscles ached — pulling his feet upward.

“Jesus, they’re going to pull me to pieces,” he thought. But then he thought, “This is Minnesota, isn’t it?”

Suddenly as if it were all really a nightmare, he noticed that he had on no trousers. He could see his bare legs like two white logs being pulled apart. He felt an incongruous young embarrassment.

He tried to struggle once more to a sitting position but they held him down. In the blurred glare he glimpsed Ed Murphy’s wry face. He could see the face floating near him as if bodiless and he could see the black hair sticking out of the ears of the bodiless head. But now he looked closer and Ed Murphy had a body and he had two hairy hands. In one of the hands he held a knife. Peter blinked and blinked. In Ed Murphy’s hand the long knife glittered; in Ed Murphy’s wry, dark face, the

wry mouth moved and twisted. Ed Murphy was saying:

“Now by God we’ll fix the son of a bitch. We’ll fix him so he won’t be bothering no women for a long time.”

Suddenly Peter began to scream.

“No. No. No.”

And he tried to smile at them. Even in this extremity he tried to smile. And he struggled to escape. But he had gone too far to smile at them, much too far, and he could not escape because they held him too securely. He was too tired, too weak, and they held him too securely. With ropes not as big around as his little finger they held him.

VII

Jack Pollak lets out a whistle the minute he sees him. You might know, Pearl. Jack Pollak, Well, and Jack steps right up to him. "How big is this trunk of yours, can I ask?" says he, sober as a judge. It seems the giant had a trunk he wanted sent through. "Because," says Jack, "if it's big like you are, I'd advise you to send it freight"... But that ain't all, Pearl. Of course that one got all the boys that was standing around — but that ain't all, Pearl. When it comes to the damages, the giant pulls out a wallet and hands Jack a five-dollar bill. Jack goes over to the cash register and rings it up, then he comes back with the change. But he don't give it to the giant. Get this, Pearl. He just stands there with the change in his hand, looking up at the giant. "Say, big boy," says he after a minute, "how about you and me fighting it out for this, winner take all?"

Well, Pearl, I wish you could have heard how the fellows around laughed. But the giant screws up that big white mug of his like he's going to cry. The big baby. Without waiting he turns and tears out into the street, leaving Jack with the change. Oh, that Jack Pollak! Didn't I always say

*precious things comes tied up in small packages,
Pearl?*

PETER FELT that his eyes were watering. He paused in the shadows at the edge of the square, took out his handkerchief and pretended to wipe the sweat from his face. There was in fact plenty of it, cold and clammy, dripping down from underneath his hatband. He dabbed away at this sweat with an abstracted air, at the same time surreptitiously drying his eyes.

The big central square of St. Malo in Brittany was paved with cobblestones. Even now in July at the height of the summer season, there were no autos, for autos were not allowed inside the walls of the town. But there were many people standing about in groups. Because it was raining they stood under umbrellas, shining wet. Back beneath the awnings of the three cafes there were many more people seated at tables, Parisians for the most part, sipping their evening apéritifs. The café in the center was the one Peter patronized. It had a large bench on the terrasse which he claimed every evening. Evidently the management with an eye to the business he attracted reserved it for him. The bench was back against the wall of the café.

Peter blew his nose and put his handkerchief away. As he went with hurried, shaky steps across the square toward the café, most of the people in it fell silent, watching him. Even to the two rival cafes on either side the silence spread. When he bent his head to go in under the awning, there were a few gasps, a few giggles, then the silence again

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 248

more tense than ever. But the minute he sat down — which he did very abruptly, as if his legs had given out under him — there was a hubbub. Several whole tablesful of people instantly stood up to see him better. Portly Frenchmen, holding their newspapers in their hands, their spectacles still on their noses, stood motionless beside their chairs, staring earnestly at him. Younger, more lively men and women rocked with laughter. Several people deserted the cafes on either side and came rushing over, hurrying to get seats near him. Very promptly, the smiling waiter, a round-faced Frenchman with a blond mustache who served him every evening, brought one of the marble-topped tables and set it down between his knees.

"Un Pernod," Peter mumbled, scarcely moving his lips, his eyes fixed straight ahead, his whole body motionless.

"Oui, Monsieur. Bonjour, Monsieur," the waiter said loudly with exaggerated courtesy.

Then he went away smiling, swinging his napkin. These few minutes before his Pernod came were always the hardest of Peter's whole day. He did not move a muscle, though the sweat dripped from underneath his hatband, streaked down his face. He sat absolutely motionless, a seemingly interminable interval, until he heard the waiter's voice at last:

"Voilà, Monsieur!"

And there, as if by magic, was the goblet on the table beside him with the greenish liquor in it, half-filling it. As if by magic, too, his own right hand moved, lifted the water bottle, sprinkled a few drops into the Pernod. The drops of water were like long clots of sperm coiling and uncoiling within the green, turning it a dangerous-looking cloudy white. Then his hand, shaking painfully, raised the goblet to his mouth, and he drained it.

The waiter stood by, holding the bottle of Pernod while

Peter drank his first one. The waiter was grinning with a kind of pride around at all the people who were standing on tiptoe or straining in their seats to see the giant drink. The proprietor himself had come to the doorway, rubbing his hands and beaming, ready to answer any questions about the American giant out of his very imperfect knowledge of him. After his first Pernod, Peter gulped two more in rapid succession, while the waiter stood by, holding the bottle. Then Peter ordered a fourth Pernod poured but he did not immediately drink it. He made himself immobile once more as if he were carved in stone. He seemed to be staring out across the terrasse, across the square, across the heads of all the people, at the high old wall of the town which encircled the other side of the square. But in reality he was looking within himself, awaiting with an almost scientific interest the first symptoms which would tell him that the liquor was taking effect. After a few minutes of this stoniness on Peter's part, the waiter shrugged his shoulders and walked away with the bottle in his hand. People at the tables around began to sigh and sit down and to talk in animated

fashion about the wonder they had just witnessed. The proprietor went from table to table very obliging, encyclopedic and assuring. And inside Peter himself came the first faint warm stirrings of the cloudy greenish licorice-tasting Pernod.

The Pernod stirred faintly at first, warming him, sending the blood into his cold hands. Later, as he still sat immobile, the stirrings grew thicker and muffled. The Pernod was not intoxicating as an ordinary liquor would be; but it had a powerful deadening effect. It was like a poison spreading through his system. After a while he was able to bring his eyes down from the wall on the other side of the square. There was a dull glaze upon his eyes like a protective film which enabled him to look briefly

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 250

around at the other tables on the terrasse. People who had been staring at him for minute after minute, were disconcerted by these brief glances of his and looked away. He began to feel more easy. Sounds and odors which he had not until this moment noticed, suddenly made themselves evident to his senses. He became conscious of the playing of

the little orchestra inside the café, the feline soothing violin, the faint tinkle of the piano. He smelled the odor of violets upon a woman a few tables distant, the stronger lilac scent of a bearded gentleman near him. Above the sound of the orchestra and of the high voices surrounding him, he heard the clatter of wooden shoes coming over the cobbled streets toward the square. Within the square itself he could hear the creak of leather, the soft padding sound of carpet slippers. Gradually near sounds became deadened, near sights blurred. All his senses now were telescopic. He plainly heard the laugh of a woman on the other side of the square a hundred feet away. This laugh stood out sharp and distinct above all the confused laughter close — surrounding him.

He began to smile faintly, relaxing upon his bench, sipping his Pernod. When the waiter passed near him again, he lifted one finger and murmured:

“Encore!”

“And I’ll still have three left,” he was thinking, gloating. He had had to limit himself to eight Pernods a day.

As the liquor rose into his brain, like a greenish vapor clouding his thoughts, dark

came down over the town, over the square. More abruptly than usual, the stormy dark came down tonight. At first there was only the drizzly gray of the sky growing grayer. Then it was as if the light of day stood still while the artificial lights inside the café grew brighter. Then all of a sudden it was dark. The square was plunged in darkness. The sky itself was

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 251

not visible at all; and the wall was lost in the black sky, save where a few dim bracket lights picked out small areas of square — hewn stones.

Now distant sounds came more distinctly than ever — and separately — the footsteps, the voices, the long-drawn toot of a paquebot, the rumble of a shutter rolling down over a store front, and from the other sea-side of the town the mounting moan of the wind. Breton peasant girls in white aprons with black shawls over their heads to protect them from the rain, walked in clattering wooden shoes across the dark square and past the dim lights, throwing broken black shadows on the wet cobbles behind them.

And the liquor was in him, cloudy in his brain, as he held the fifth Pernod like a small

green jewel to his lips, sipping, looking, listening.

2

Peter sat on and on, though nearly every one else had left the café and though it was growing colder and the drizzle came down unceasing. He clung to his bench on the empty lighted terrasse, looking from one to another of the few people on it, watching a waiter who was straightening a line of tables, listening for every sound in the drizzly dark square. He had his seventh Pernod. He drank it miserly, drop by drop. Then for a long while he sat and would not order his last Pernod. It was almost eight o'clock. Since he had come to St. Malo, he had not stayed away from the Pension so late. It was already well past the Pension dinner hour.

At a quarter after eight he ordered his last Pernod. The chill had crept into him and he needed the Pernod to warm him. So he drank it down in a gulp, though

unwillingly; but it was not enough to warm him. He sat shivering, longing to order another Pernod but he would not. He was determined that he would not. In Paris he had drunk himself nearly to death. That was why he had come to St. Malo — why he had limited himself to eight Pernods a day. He was afraid. That was it. He was morbidly afraid that he would die in this strange country, surrounded by all these strange and hostile little Frenchmen. His body, maimed though it was, would be claimed for a curiosity, established in a museum, placed naked on a marble slab for medical students to grin at. The little people would cluster like flies around his dead body ...

He sighed and shivered, looking out under the awning into the drizzly dark square. He felt cold and heavy and drugged as if he had been sleeping drunk. A few people were beginning to come back into the café. Obviously they had already had their dinners. They looked warm and well-fed as they settled down comfortably into the chairs around him, ordered coffee and liqueurs, and sat looking at him. Still the café remained comparatively empty. It was too bad a night for many people to come out.

He sat gazing straight ahead of him blankly; and now for the first time he noticed that a big white sheet like a sail had been hung down from the top of the wall on the other side of the square. Evidently from one of the upper windows of the café itself a motion picture camera was being focused upon the sheet. For a long time he sat watching the vague big figures undulating upon the white sheet as the wind from the sea blew it to and fro. The orchestra inside the café must have gone home or was resting. There was no sound save the moaning of the wind, the steady drip of the rain, an occasional low ejaculation from one or other of the few watching groups upon the terrasse. Still the vague big figures swung gently to and

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 253

fro, their vague bodies flapping in unexpected crazy movements. It was all ghostly, without any significance he could gather. Yet he stayed on, watching, cold and heavy, as if it were impossible for him to move. A waiter came and rattled the saucers on the table. He saw that it was a different waiter from the one who customarily served him; but he felt no surprise. He took a bill from his pocket and

laid it beside the saucers. Then he swayed to his feet. He felt cold and heavy as he walked out from beneath the awning. He saw that there were men and women and children, standing in the rain on either side of the café huddled together. Evidently they had been standing there, looking at the pictures gratis; but now they were all looking at him.

He crossed the square to the wall and went slowly up the cold black vault of a staircase cut in the stone.

This wall, which completely encircled the town, was several centuries old, high and massive. The top of it was so wide that two carriages might have driven abreast along it. People of St. Malo and tourists visiting Brittany, used the top of the wall for a promenade. Peter, too. Every evening before his apéritifs he circled the wall eight times. That was part of his new régime. There would nearly always be people lined all along the wall waiting for him to go past. They would stand to one side or the other, watching him come toward them, watching him go away from them; and when he came around again, they would be still in the same places waiting for him. It was as if the wall were his individual promenade at these times and all

the other people formed his audience. In high excited French voices, in loud blatant English ones, they would be discussing him, his gait, his clothes. Rarely he would hear American voices, too, and would feel homesick. But then he would deride himself. He was no American. He

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 254

belonged to no country in the world. People for him were the same everywhere.

Now, of course, the top of the wall was deserted. There were only the stones gleaming wet in the faint light from the square. Without looking down again into the square, he walked slowly, mechanically away around the town. The wind began to blow at him as he left the leeward side of town; as he came near the Pension Bellevue the wind was blowing with tempest force out of the black night. He stood motionless for a time, facing the wind, listening to the roar of the waves as they broke against the rocky base of the wall. He could not see anything of the sea. Once he thought he distinguished a faint light-twinkle far out. He thought it might have been a low star, though all the sky was black.

The wind was cold and wet and it blew against him with surprising power. But he remained absolutely wooden, standing there. For minute after minute no sensation at all, until he had almost reached the conclusion that he really was drugged. Then suddenly something inside him began to ache.

"It must be my stomach," he thought. It was such an ache!

But in a minute he realized that it was not his stomach. It was not anything he could define. He was desperately afraid that he was going to burst out crying.

Groping in the darkness, he found a staircase leading down into the narrow street below. He hurried, almost running, along the street until he came to the door of the Pension Bellevue. There were three people standing in the hall; but he brushed past them. The first four flights of stairs led up through the main building of the Pension Bellevue where, in identical small rooms, all the other pensionnaires were lodged. His room was on the fifth

floor in a kind of square tower which jutted up from the rest of the building.

On the stairs he met no one. He had begun to cry already when he reached the tower stairs.

As soon as he was inside his room, he closed the door and locked it. But then he could no longer cry. After sitting for a time in the darkness, he turned on the single dim electric light. The room showed cold and bare. Most of the furniture had been removed for his accommodation or pushed back against the walls not to be in his way.

He kept sighing, then yawning. There was a congested feeling inside him. The wind rattled the windows. The raw cold oozed into the room, penetrant and clammy. He had taken off his overcoat when he came in; but now he reached out his hand to it and pulled it over his shoulders. Still his teeth chattered. It was useless to resist this cold which iced all his limbs, crept into his body, into all his inner being. He said aloud with a kind of smile:

“Great God, if this is summer, what do these people do in winter?”

But the sound of his own voice high, uncertain, in the close room, repelled him. It seemed to hang in the cold air about him like something visible and unpleasant which he did not want to look upon. He thought: “It

surely was not so cold outside!" — and quickly raised the window.

The wind came screeching in. It blew Paris — American newspapers on the table all over the floor. And big spots of rain came in; but it did seem warmer. The wind had a mild large quality when he met it this way full on. He thrust his head out of the window and breathed deeply, letting the wind rush into him. The overcoat fell away from his shoulders but he did not mind.

The wind blew his hair wildly, pumped down into his lungs. He shut his eyes and rested his chin on the sill. As

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 256

he crouched there in this awkward position, mild warm tears began to flow from under his closed lids. They dripped from his hawk nose, from his curved lips, and his chin; and the wind whipped them up, mingling them with the drops of rain. He made a moaning noise in his throat.

"Oh, my God! I am lonely!"

The moan in his throat was like the moan of the wind, something for which he was not responsible but which he heard, which affected him. It would rise into a sob, then

sink low again, then rise with an added whistle through his nostrils. And he imagined that it was soothing, as he imagined that the wind was like kindly fingers in his hair. He imagined that he was a child again. His mother stood over him, soothing him, that white surprised woman, with her fingers in his hair.

“But why are you not out with the other boys playing?”

He began to weep wildly, passionately, with his eyes shut and his chin on the sill. What a distance he had come from that time, from his mother! He thought back on his childhood — the strange sick feeling he had had, as of some one in a dream who cannot stop himself, who is borne irresistibly along, battered against all the hard walls, against all the sharp corners.

When he had kept on growing! He remembered those years and the dead pain in his legs and his father laughing, the short bluff man, impious or blind. “Just growing pains, boy! Growing pains!” But, oh, the strange weed feeling as he had shot up and up, past the normal man’s stature, though he was only a child. Still he had not stopped growing; he had gone on and on, though his soul within him had cried out in agony: ‘A mistake! Good

God, it is a terrible mistake! Some one must stop it — must stop it!" His mother with her white face turned aside, frowning:

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 257

"My boy, you are fine. In spite of everything, I want you always to remember that you are a gentleman born and bred." Every night he had studied himself, standing before a mirror in his boy's night-clothes, looking at himself helplessly, wide-eyed, with a sick feeling.

How he had grown! Up and up and out and out. Past all reason, all proportion. He had felt as if he were being removed — as if there were some strange force in him, which drew him up irresistibly away from life, away from all normal people, their close warm companionship, all the little friendships he had so desperately contracted. He could see them at his feet, sinking down, sinking away from him, and he could not reach down to them to hold them. All the people walked in close groups beneath him.

If he cried out to them, they looked up, frightened and hostile. And how was the air up there? Well, it was cold, it was cold.

And he had been too big — yes, far too big. When he had tried to go down among normal

people at last, they had been afraid he would crush them. They had fled his big feet, his big clumsy apologetic gestures. They had run terrified and screaming, but turning to throw their tiny darts at him, their tiny poison darts.

“Keep away! Keep away!”

He saw himself walking, walking through a multitude of them and all of them screaming:

“Keep away! Keep away!”

And he himself straining, all his muscles straining, trying to control the movements of his great limbs. The sweat streamed down his face, dripped from his chin. But it was useless. He did not know how to stop. He had forgotten how to stop. He could no longer manage this giant body of his — this immense artificial framework in which he lived. There was a mushy sound; his heel had

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 258

crushed something soft. He took a quick backward step. Again the sound and a little scream dying away. He had tried so hard; now he completely lost his balance. He fell with a crash. There were splatters of pigmy blood on the ground beside him where he fell.

With a multitudinous small cry all the little people came running. They threw themselves

upon him, stamping, biting, beating. He could see Leo and Anna and Charley and Ed Murphy and even Elisabeth Whitefield — long and thin — rushing at him. And there was his own father, close with the other pigmies, coming at him. He struggled, swayed, trying to get up again.

“You should have kept away! You should have kept away!”

The tears were streaming down, salt in his nostrils, and whipped by the sea wind into his wide open mouth. Now he would never be able to get up again. Now they had crushed forever that great framework of his body. They had leveled the new magnificent experiment of his being. They had stretched him flat and futile upon the flat earth.

He moaned aloud:

“Oh, Mother!”

If only he might go back all that weary distance to her.

He was so lonely. He was so far away and cold. If he might crawl back into her again, between the white warm loins into the warm dark flesh. He wanted to go back. He wanted her womb to close around him again, wrapping him in close and warm with a fluid warmth like a tongue. He would curl up

inside, gentle as a babe in that eternal night, and never want for anything, never any more.

But here was he grown so big and the door shut to him, forever barred. His mother was dead — because she

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 259

had borne him. The white surprised woman had died empty of him. Now here was he, terribly swollen, wailing and frightened, unable to get back.

He imagined his dead mother grown big, white and big as a mountain, so that he might crawl back into her again. But she was so dead; and the years had rolled between. There was no refuge for him any place.

With Anna he had felt a kind of covering. She was small; but for brief minutes he had lost himself in her. He had felt her dark inferior flesh kindly about him. That had been a sin, and he had paid for it. He had paid for it so dearly. Ordinary men were not sinners because they hid themselves in the flesh of women. All their lives ordinary men had these refuges against the bright day.

But all refuges were closed to him. He was constantly fleeing but there was no escape. He was all alone.

Peter walked hurriedly away from the Seine in Paris, The narrow dark street he was following crossed a boulevard dim-lit and with trees on either side and a row of taxicabs standing' idle in the center. The boulevard looked deserted in the stifling hot September night. It was almost one o'clock.

Peter started across the boulevard. Immediately, as if by some inevitable arrangement, endlessly repetitious, the boulevard came to life. A bus appeared from nowhere clanging toward him. The bus which was empty of passengers screeched to a noisy stop in front of him, like a balky horse frightened; and from the bus the amazed face of the driver was thrust, and from the line of standing taxicabs sleepy mustachioed faces of chauffeurs. In the

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 260

wide dim-lit boulevard a murmur arose and swelled, as if a wind were stirring the leaves of the motionless limp trees.

“Oh, for Chrissake!” Peter grumbled. “Let me alone.”

He reached the other side of the boulevard and the narrow mouth of the dark street swallowed him once more.

“For Chrissake!”

He swayed as he walked, zigzagging. The street was scarcely more than fifteen feet wide with the buildings rising high on either side, wall-like. The air in this deep tunnel was hot and rank, suffocating. At each corner a solitary street-lamp cast a yellowish circle on the smooth greasy pavement. Whenever he passed one of these lamps, which were all on a level with his head, he averted his face as if instinctively, as if he instinctively did not want the light to shine upon his face, lighting up his sharp features and the weakened look about his mouth and the dark rings beneath his eyes.

He kept as well as he could to the middle of the street and walked as fast as he could. He had been lying for more than an hour this midnight, stretched full length beside the Seine. He had gone down below the quays to a stone pier at the very edge of the black muddied river. Lying on the pier with his hands behind his head, he had listened to the

river, while he looked upward at the stars, smiling faintly, breathing greenish vapors toward the stars; and the river had gurgled, had made tiny cackles, slipping past. He had intended to drown himself. Now here was his body that should have been dead, carrying him as fast as it could away from the river.

“For Chrissake,” he grumbled, grumbling and panting, unsteadily swaying on his swift-driven legs.

In his pocket were the two cables from Mrs. Williams,

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 261

the two tiny slips of paper which had completed his separation from the world. The first cable, which had been telegraphed on to him at St. Malo by Morgan and Company in Paris contained the news that his father was dead. “Deaf,” the French telegraph had transmitted it: “Father deaf.” And for a long while he had puzzled over it stupidly, not understanding. It seemed to him that he had been puzzling over it during all the three weeks since. He had come back to Paris and had drunk up the five hundred dollars Mrs. Williams had sent him for his passage to America. Then, just this morning, the second

cable had come, exasperated: "Affairs in dreadful state advise return." That had even amused him but it had made everything clear. It was like his father to go abruptly dead, leaving things in a mess for Mrs. Williams, leaving his own giant son to face the world penniless. "Really all alone, now," he had thought with a certain humor, "A giant on my own at last!" Yet he had been terrified. He had felt that he was indeed helpless as a babe in his giant stature. He had sat in his Paris hotel room smiling and nodding, fatalistic, contained, but with the abject fear inside him. It had occurred to him that in the future perhaps he would not even have money to get drunk with; and that had sent him out in a real panic, half-running to a café.

Now he had about forty francs left — maybe fifty francs. And that was all the money he had in the world.

The street twisted and turned between the close gray buildings; sometimes it went slightly up, sometimes slightly down; in places it could not have been more than ten feet across. He hiccuped; and, hearing the hiccup echo, he stood stock-still listening to it, the old sound of his hiccup going upward into the air within the narrow street, up and up

between the close buildings and back and forth from one stone front to another, as if straddling the street,

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 262

climbing up with difficulty to the sky, to the narrow black strip of sky high up between the cornices with its faint star twinkles.

When the echo had stopped, there was no other sound anywhere around him, though he stood motionless listening. In the very early dark morning the city slept. This part of the city slept gray and still. And yet he could sense behind the close-shuttered windows faint stirrings which were not really sounds at all, intimate warm stirrings of the little humans in their beds. Standing quite alone in the center of the narrow street, looking upward toward the sky, it seemed to him that he could see, through all the walls and all the shuttered windows, all the little people lying and turning in this sleeping Paris, their mouths wide open — or quick upon their beds in the black hot night, glued together, one upon the other with bright monkey looks in the close darkness.

And he had not any place in this sleeping Paris. He had not any place in the world

beyond. Why had he been a coward just now? After he had drowned himself, they could have fished out his body. They could have stripped his swollen body, placed it on a marble slab. He would not have cared, though all the world saw what the little men had done to him. Far better for them to peer then, crowd close and peer and joke and laugh and probe and tear — after he was dead and he could no longer care. He could no longer be conscious of their cruelty — of the in-finite cruelty of the world for what is different.

Now his father had died and had shown him the way. That short square strange man whose black presumption had wrought a monstrous being into the little world, had died. He had cleared out and left the son he had created to face the world alone. Oh, how could any father ever dare to sire a son? For son would follow

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 263

father. In some dark corner of the after-world, giant son would face pigmy father at last and there would no longer be any constraint between them and there would be a reckoning, swift and terrible. Yes, now he would go back to the Seine; he would throw

himself into the black muddied waters. This time he would not hesitate ...

He had stood perhaps five minutes motionless in the center of the narrow street, looking upward toward the sky, when he became conscious of a pattering noise somewhere below him — sharp little pats, quick and close together, like the sounds made by the first drops of rain on a roof but more regular and distinct, each pat separate. He was puzzled and irritated, withdrawing his gaze from the sky, straightening his head once more and lowering his eyes, looking frowning down. At first he could not make out where the sounds came from; but then he saw a man. The man was coming toward him along one of the narrow sidewalks, some distance away. He wore a derby hat, white spats, and carried a cane. Obviously he had not yet seen Peter. He was walking along, his head bent down, flicking at his white spats with the cane.

Suddenly Peter noticed something that made him start and rub his eyes. The man was crossing an alley which intersected the street at this point. There was a curb which separated the alley from the sidewalk beyond. The curb could not be more than a foot high. The man came to the curb — and it reached

almost to his waist! He put his hand on the curb and with a show of agility vaulted to the sidewalk. He straightened his clothes, pulling down his coat at the back. Then he came briskly along once more, his white spats twinkling, still gazing down with an absorbed air. Surely he must be less than three feet tall. A midget.

Peter shivered slightly, drawing back. The midget came

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 264

briskly on, his head bent down. He was almost opposite Peter now; still he had not lifted his eyes from the ground. Peter must have moved unconsciously, for his foot made a crunching noise on the pavement. The midget stopped. Peter caught a flash of uneven rodent teeth and of two beadlike eyes as the midget craned his neck.

“Jove!” said the midget in a high squeaky English voice.

Oh, rat-like he was, his eyes, his teeth, and his voice! Peter shivered once more, drawing back, making a rumbling noise in his throat.

“By Jove!” squeaked the midget again.

Peter could see the tiny buttons on the gay-figured vest gleaming like the two beady eyes

that were fixed so intently upon him. The midget was perfectly formed, a perfect little miniature of a man and an obvious Cockney in this gray Paris street. He stood now at the very edge of the sidewalk with his hands behind him, holding the cane, his head tilted back, looking steadily up at Peter.

Peter's two hands twitched. He did not know what to do. He distinctly felt that there were French people behind all the near shutters, breathless, watching the two of them. There was a shuttered window directly behind his head. He could smell the dusty odor of the grayish moldering wood; and a warmth came out of the room like a watching warm presence, ruffling the hair on his neck. He opened his mouth, then closed it, opened and closed it.

"I say, how *is* the air up there?" asked the midget suddenly with a squeaky laugh, switching his cane.

Peter leaned toward the midget and frowned.

"Why, you—you—you—" he mumbled but he could not go on. He was shaking all over with repugnance.

"What's the matter, fellow?" asked the midget. "Jitters?"

“Go away!” Peter screamed and he made a lunge at the midget. But the midget was quick. Though he could have

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 265

been expecting nothing of this sort, he turned on the instant and fled. His legs twinkled as he ran quickly along the smooth sidewalk. Peter had stumbled in his lunge and almost fallen. He was forced to lean against a building to steady himself, and the midget ran away directly beneath him, between his leaning body and the wall. Peter grabbed down at him with one hand but missed. Peter remained leaning against the wall, breathing heavily.

The midget had come to a stop about thirty feet away and was staring curiously back. Peter waved his hands in the air.

“Go away!”

The midget stayed where he was, staring. His beady eyes were bright but hard, unterrified.

“Go away! Go away!”

But as the midget still did not stir, Peter himself suddenly wheeled and ran. He ran away from the midget — back in the direction he had come from — back in the direction of

the Seine. He ran perhaps half a block, then lost his balance and fell. The impact which was terrific stunned him. He lay for several minutes stretched full length on the greasy pavement. Then he sat up. He began to rub his bruised arms and legs and to cry. Sitting slumped against a stone building, his feet in the middle of the street, he wept great Pernod tears of misery.

The midget had followed him slowly along the sidewalk but had stopped again while still a good distance away.

“Oh, I say,” he squeaked tentatively.

He was standing at the base of the street lamp, his eyes bright as ever, his bowler hat round and yellow like a toad-stool under the downward streaming light.

Peter looked at him briefly, then looked away, his shoulders heaving, shaken by hiccuping sobs.

The midget switched his cane indecisively. After a

minute he came walking slowly nearer, keeping his eyes on Peter, stopping at last about ten feet away. He stood on tiptoe and spoke in a very penetrating loud squeak:

“I say — you can’t scare me, you know.”

Peter continued to weep. The midget took two or three more steps toward him and ventured another remark:

“But I know how it is when you’re half-seas over. I hold no hard feelings.”

“Oh, go away.” Peter sobbed. “Leave me alone!”

The midget stayed where he was, switching his cane about, rocking back and forth on his feet.

“Krudge is my name,” said the midget briskly,

“Krudge!”

At length he grew dictatorial, standing there, peering over one of Peter’s knees.

“Come now, my man. You must straighten up. The Frenchies will be after you with their gendarmes and all.”

Peter said nothing; but he raised his head and looked through his tears at Krudge — the beady eyes, the little weazened Cockney face, the abrupt imperative gestures. Krudge was growing more and more impatient. He tapped Peter’s ankle with his cane.

“Come, have a drink with me, fellow. That’ll straighten you up. American, aren’t you? What’s your name?”

Peter told him between two sobs.

“Never heard of you,” said Krudge promptly, “but we people must stick together.” And he repeated: “Krudge is my name. Smallest in Creation. Cirque d’Hiver.”

Peter listened dully, scarcely comprehending.

“Come now,” said Krudge. “Come now, Blenner. Pick yourself up.”

Peter got slowly to his feet. He felt weak and dizzy. He felt dizzy leaving little Krudge so far down below him;

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 267

and he felt that his aching head, as he rose, must clank’ against one close stone building or the other.

Krudge was looking up at him.

“Jove, you are a big one — biggest I’ve ever seen!”

Peter blinked at the strip of sky above him.

“I’m nine feet two,” he mumbled.

“You don’t say!” Krudge shook his head and made a minute clucking noise with his tongue. Then he said proudly: “I’m thirty-two inches. Nine feet two and thirty-two inches. That’s not bad, is it?”

“No.”

“Well,” said Krudge. “Now, Blenner, you follow me.” He started off up the street. This was still in the direction of the Seine. After a minute Peter followed. Peter walked in the center of the street. Krudge swung briskly along the narrow sidewalk. Peter would take two slow unsteady steps; then wait for Krudge to catch up with him. Krudge was an agile little fellow and walked fast; but they weren’t making very good time this way. At length Krudge called a halt, scratched his ear, and looked up at Peter.

“I’ll tell you what, Blenner,” he said in his high dictatorial voice, “the place we’re going is eight or ten squares off. I’ll let you carry me. But mind you pick me up right.”

Peter stood awkwardly, not looking at Krudge.

“Lean over!” Krudge commanded.

Peter leaned over and Krudge showed him how to take hold, a thumb beneath one armpit, the tip of the fore-finger beneath the other.

“And don’t squeeze,” Krudge said. “Now straighten up. Easy. Easy. Now set me on your shoulder. Face me the other way, stupid. Now take your hand away. That’s right. That’s fine!”

And Krudge perched on Peter's left shoulder, very comfortable, dangling his legs.

"How's that?" he asked triumphantly.

Peter was trembling. He kept his head turned to one side so that he would not see Krudge. He felt confused and uneasy and he felt definitely that he ought not to go with Krudge, that he ought to set him down and leave him. There was a heavy premonition of evil.

"All right! All right!" said Krudge. "Get started, Blenner!"

Peter obeyed. He did everything as Krudge ordered. There was even a pleasure in being guided this way — like a child — from step to step; he had wandered so long, all his life, it seemed, directionless. Now there was the sharp little voice at his left ear, peremptory — the two sharp little heels kicking into his chest.

"Straight ahead, stupid!"

Only when he thought of the Seine, he could have groaned aloud. And he felt now an even greater longing for those black muddied waters — for the kind of peace he had felt, stretched full length on the pier. Turning over and over in that swift downward current, he

would have been secure. No strange little creature — surely creature of evil — could have guided him through the gray Paris streets toward something he knew not but instinctively feared.

“Keep going! Keep going!”

He was far too tired and too weak to resist. There was only the will-less inert mass of his body in dumb passive protest. Like some ponderous beast of burden he swayed and he stumbled in spiritless half-attempts to unseat what was on him. Krudge kept his balance perfectly like a trained circus rider, dangling his legs.

They passed a corner café. The café was closed, the awnings rolled up, the iron shutters rolled down.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 269

“Turn to your right here,” Krudge ordered. “Right! Right!”

They turned into a very narrow street, a mere alley paved with rough cobble-stones. There were several small shops, close-shuttered and dark.

“Here’s the place,” said Krudge abruptly. “Set me down!”

The shop he indicated looked dark as any of the other buildings in the alley; but as Peter leaned over to set Krudge down, a glint of light came out through a crack in the door, shining in his eye.

"It's a good cheap place," said Krudge explanatorily. The instant he was set down, his tone had changed, as if the act of dismounting had restored him to sociability. "The johnny keeps it dark because he hasn't got a license to stay open so late. Lots of circus people come here."

Krudge stood on tiptoe importantly and tapped at the door with his cane. He gave three taps, then three more. Peter felt his heart beating faster, but faint and far away. Now, if ever, was the chance for him to escape. He could see the muddied waters of the Seine rolling downward. But there was a heavy depression upon him, paralyzing his will.

The door opened a crack and a fat mustachioed sleepy looking Frenchman stuck his head out. He saw Krudge and smiled and then saw Peter and gave him exactly the same smile, showing no astonishment.

"*Mon ami*," Krudge explained, jerking his thumb at Peter, then walking smartly in.

Peter followed, bending low to go through the door which the Frenchman, who wore a dirty apron, quickly shut behind him. There were only three other people in the place which was small and very dingy. A man sat alone in one corner with his head sunk down on a table,

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 270

asleep. He had a shiny bald head with a curious fringe of black hair around it; he looked fat and paunchy. Standing side by side at the bar were two younger men who were talking furiously in Italian. They saw Krudge and Peter, but did not stop talking and did not turn around to stare.

"Trapezists," whispered Krudge, contemptuously.

And he paid no more attention to them; but with his cane he pointed out to Peter the bald-headed man at the table in the corner.

"That's Enrico," he announced loudly. "The best clown in Paris. I've done some work with him at the Cirque."

Enrico opened one eye, without lifting his bald head from the table, and looked at 'them. Then he shut the eye again.

"Drunk as an owl!" said Krudge.

There was a heavy stale odor of wine in the place. The bar was of wood, scarred and dirty. Ranged along one side of the room were six or seven small round iron tables; in the rear, a cobwebby dusty stove which might have been going full blast the room was so hot. On the table next Enrico was an old-fashioned gramophone with a horn. The ceiling and walls were covered with brownish tin. Peter had to stand stooped with his head on one side just under the ceiling. Here all the rank odors and the hottest fetid air seemed to have gathered; and the tin of the ceiling itself radiated heat, smelled sour and old and dusty.

The Frenchman was behind the bar, rubbing his hands together sleepily and asking them what they would have. Krudge took white wine, Peter another Pernod.

Krudge jerked a thumb at the two young trapezists and leered up at Peter. His little face looked very old and weazened and knowing, especially with the leer upon it.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 271

“Mussolini,” he piped. “These two johnnies are reds. They’re in here every night, talking it over.”

Peter finished his Pernod and ordered another. He felt so tired suddenly that he was hardly able to keep on his legs. He staggered away from the bar and sat down on the floor over against one wall. He half-emptied his glass, then put it on the table next him. After a minute Krudge followed carrying his glass of white wine in both hands like a bowl. He stood on tiptoe to put the glass on the table beside Peter's. The glass tipped in his small hands and a little of the wine spilled over onto the scarred iron table top. He seized a chair by one leg and pulled it over near the table. Facing the chair he climbed up onto a rung as onto a ladder, then screwed himself around, and sat down. Seated so, his head came just above the iron rim of the table.

The two young Italians had never for a minute stopped their talking. Enrico in the corner had not stirred. The bar-tender, too, appeared to have gone to sleep. He was sitting on a high stool behind the bar with his head tilted back, the light shining straight down on his upturned face, the fat red cheeks, the mouth open beneath drooping mustachios.

"Well, how do you like it here?" asked Krudge expansively. "That Pernod will cost

you just sixty centimes. I'll wager you've been paying at least one franc fifty."

Peter made no attempt to respond. He finished his glass in a gulp, fished a ten franc bill out of his pocket, and laid it on the table. Then he sighed, took off his hat, and rested his head against the tin wall. His hair was untidy. His eyes were red and puffy underneath.

"You're no ordinary giant," Krudge was saying, "I can see that at a glance. What type of thing have you been working at, Blenner?"

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 272

Peter opened his eyes. After a minute he answered:

"Nothing."

Krudge seemed surprised.

"No reason for you ever to be out of work, Blenner."

Peter was silent.

"Or maybe you have money?" Krudge questioned.

"That's nice."

Peter raised his voice high.

"I haven't any money. I haven't any job. What business is that of yours?"

Krudge was smiling, moving his little hands deprecatingly.

“Oh, well, if you don’t want to be sociable ... You don’t look like you could live on nothing, you know.”

“I haven’t any way to live. I haven’t anything. And I ought to be dead. I’d be dead now if you hadn’t — hadn’t butted in!”

He finished in some confusion, stammering. He was surprised at himself for what he had said. He felt tricked as if it were Krudge’s fault that he had exposed himself so. He glanced quickly about the room but nobody else seemed to have noticed. He looked at Krudge.

“That’s just a joke,” he said. “I—I’ve always had quite a sense of humor!”

Krudge said nothing but continued to smile, peering over the iron rim of the table at him. Oh, yes, there was something evil about this midget with his weazened old face and beady eyes. There was something evil about the two young Italians, Enrico in the corner, and the sleepy bar-tender. There was an evil quality in this dingy mustard-colored room which gave everything about it a diabolic cast. He felt that it was a nightmare room with nightmare people in it. And this was not only because he

was drunk, because things slid together or separated when he looked at them.

"I must be going," he said. "I must be going along."

But he did not see how he could get to his feet.

The two young Italians were growing more lively. The clown, Enrico, too, had come surprisingly to life. He was sitting up at his table with his head in his hands, both eyes open. His eyes were black but shapeless as if they had been smudged on with charcoal. His jowls hung down loose. His whole face was loose and flabby and startlingly white and broad.

One of the young Italians went across the room to the gramophone which was on the table next Enrico. As he leaned over, winding it up, Enrico suddenly rose from his chair, gave him a smacking kiss on the buttocks, then collapsed in his chair again, laughing weakly. His white face seemed to go to pieces, breaking into loose segments, wrinkles, gullies. The young Italian laughed, too, continuing to wind the gramophone, with his buttocks close up to Enrico's face, insulting.

The gramophone began to grind out a tune, cracked and raucous, and the young Italian went back to the bar, laughing. His companion addressed several words to him in a quick angry voice.

Enrico drank from a half-empty glass on his table before him. Then he got unsteadily to his feet and came walking across the room toward Krudge and Peter. Though he was very drunk and old and fat, he walked with a curious litheness and grace, his big belly swaying rhythmic.

“By far the best clown in Paris,” said Krudge, winking at Peter and smiling and nodding at Enrico.

Enrico stood close beside the table looking from Krudge to Peter, then back again. Peter stared dully into the

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 274

smudge — black eyes. Enrico hiccuped and spoke in quick broken Italian — English.

“Smallest *and* beegest in creation!” he said.

Krudge began to laugh, looking at Peter.

“Wat a pair!” said Enrico. “Wat a team!”

He leaned over the table and picked up the glass of white wine which Krudge had scarcely touched. He drank it down lightly, as

if he were performing a trick, his small red mouth opening amid white creases of flesh. Then he struck himself on the chest.

"Me!" he said, "No beeg — no small — just clevailr!" He laughed and repeated — "Just clevailr!"

He turned lightly, his belly pendulous, and went swaying back past the bar. He did not even glance at the two trapezists but went on, walking grandly, playing the grand artiste, to his table in the corner, where he collapsed once more, his head on his hands. The record ground to an end.

"Drunk as an owl," said Krudge.

Peter hardly heard. He had hardly heard what Enrico said and he had not comprehended anything. He could feel himself sinking down into the greenish Pernod haze, the drunken stupor that he knew so well. But it seemed intensified tonight, thicker — in a dense greenish haze all these evil figures. His body felt light, as if its weight had been dispersed, but clumsy, too, and of a swollen bulk like a body under water — turning over and over in heavy greenish viscid waves. But the waters of the Seine were muddied. Were there only such waters, muddied or green? He seemed to remember to

have bathed in a small creek that was clear, crystal clear, rippling past his white body.

“D’you know, there’s an idea there, Blenner,” said Krudge. “What a pair. D’you hear?”

Even that small imperative face, through the viscid torrent, wavered greenish-colored.

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 275

“I say, Blenner. D’you hear? Come now, man, straighten up! Let’s talk business. You know what I’ve been thinking.”

All the room was wavering seen through the thickly moving green. And there were the figures in it like evil seaweed shapes. God, and he was sinking. His body was loose and flabby and gutted, without power.

“You won’t have to know anything,” Krudge was saying. “I’ll do it all. I’ve the experience. I’ve the brains. I know my way around.”

Peter was confused. He could plainly see Krudge’s little weazened face close below him; but at the same time he had the feeling that Krudge was perched on his shoulder. He was swimming around and around in the thick green maelstrom with Krudge on his shoulder, perched imperturbable, kicking into him with sharp heels, saying, “Turn right here! Turn left there!” And all the time down

below him Krudge's squeaky voice went on and on:

"Now I'll be boss. We'll split the money 60-40. Smallest *and* biggest in creation. The perfect team. No French circuses for us. We'll go to America. We'll get under the big top. We'll make money. We'll make big money." . .

But it didn't seem reasonable that he was really swimming around. Perhaps he was walking around in a ring with Krudge on his shoulder — around and around. Such hot choked air and such a dim confusion, and all the people laughing, a whole dim shadowy audience laughing. Maybe it was the sense of humor which had made him famous in his fraternity and maybe he was saying bright scintillating things. But then it did not seem to him that he was saying anything. It seemed to him that he was doing nothing but walking around and around, Krudge's little hard body, warm, companionable, on his shoulder,

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 276

but sharp, with sharp heels, digging into him, commanding. And they were a pair. Yes, a pair. But then what was Krudge doing on his shoulder, driving him? Oh, but he was so cowed — like a beast of burden — so beaten

and there was a kind of comfort in it, in this dumb submission at last; even the little sharp heels were comforting, digging into him. What was the sharp voice saying? What?

“Now if it’s a go with you — it’s a go with me. I’ll foot whatever expenses you have until we get going — until we get our act going. It’s a go?”

Peter made one last effort. With all the strength that was in him, he opened his mouth, his cavernous great mouth. He had intended to shout “No! No!” but in this moment words would not come out of him. He could see the two Italians at the bar, the clown Enrico in his corner, and the bar-tender asleep on his stool; but he could not say any words.

“Uh—uh—uh—” he said.

Then he was sinking down again. What was this? He was sinking down again into the thick green waters. Where was the slow ring he had trod, the shadowy audience, and Krudge? Had he lost that small warm presence, too? No, on the instant Krudge’s voice cracked out, sharp and commanding, “Come now, man! Pull yourself together!” and he was reassured. It was right that they should be together. After all, they were a pair.

Now he would no longer be alone, though the green flood closed over his head, flowed into his open mouth, sickish, licorice-tasting. He did not even need to struggle any more. Krudge would guide, the sharp little voice, the sharp little heels.

“Why—uh—all right—uh—all right—uh—” he mumbled.

He let himself go lax, his big body lax and loose. And the green viscid whirlpool swept him around and around and it was somehow restful. There was Krudge perched

GIANTS SHOULD BE GELDED 277

on his shoulder, talking on and on, and here was he being swept around and around and his big head lax on the waters nodding up and down, like a barrel on the waters — a round circus barrel on these green waters? — nodding up and down, as if he would never do anything more in his life but leave it to his head to nod up and down in barrel-like agreement.

“Sacré ...”

“Sacré ...”

“Vous avez vu? ...”

“Quelle paire ...

“Sacré ...”

“Allons!

“Suivons!

“Sacré ...”

“Quelle paire ...

